"HOOSIERS"

a screenplay by

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FOR EDUCATIONAL
PURPOSES ONLY

FADE IN:

1 INT. APARTMENT - BUFFALO, NEW YORK - CLOSE ON A BLACK-AND-WHITE PHOTOGRAPH OF A MAN - DUSK (1952)

in his mid-thirties holding a trophy, full of joy, standing straight and proud. As we PULL BACK, we see he is among a victorious basketball team. The logo underneath reads: ITHACA STATE - 1939 NATIONAL SMALL COLLEGE DIVISION CHAMPIONS. As CAMERA PULLS BACK FURTHER, the framed picture is taken off the wall and thrown into a suitcase. NORMAN DALE, 40-plus years and not so straight and proud, nor full of joy, shuts the suitcase wearily, pulls it off the bed, walks to the door and looks around for the last time at his cramped, disheveled quarters.

2 EXT. APARTMENT - DUSK

As Norm throws his suitcase into a dark green Chevy, all we see are the brown and gray hues of working-class Buffalo. The car pulls away.

3 EXT. CAR - TRAVELLING SHOTS - NIGHT

The car moves quietly through the night, first among many lights, then few.

DISSOLVE TO:

4 EXT. HIGHWAY - DAWN

The car travelling down an empty highway. As we PASS a sign reading, "Welcome to Indiana", we hear the FARAWAY SOUND of a BASKETBALL BOUNCING.

The car pulls off the highway and heads down a rural country road. Flat fields give way to autumn-colored rolling hills and freshly-harvested farmland valleys.

The land is quiet, gentle, and full of splendor.

5 EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - SOUTHERN INDIANA - DAY (OCTOBER, 1951)

We see the car pass a sign, SUNVILLE - HOME OF THE SHINERS, POPULATION 900 -- and emerge into a tiny glen with a cluster of simple framed houses.

(CONTINUED)

5 CONTINUED:

As the car pulls in front of what appears to be the main business in town -- Junior's Gas and General Store -- we see in the dusty driveway what we have been hearing: a tall redheaded BOY shooting baskets at a battered backboard and rim over the garage door. The car is motionless for a few moments until a gentle HORN requests service. When there is still no response, Norm gets out of the car. He looks slightly out of place in his fully-buttoned white shirt, gray slacks, and Bryl-creamed hair. The Boy keeps shooting... and hitting.

NORM
Anybody home?

From the front door comes a round, overalled FIGURE swinging his arms to make the body go faster and furiously chewing "ter-backer."

JUNIOR
J. June. Customer's waitin'.

Without changing his shooting rhythm, the boy keeps pumping away.

J. JUNE
Gotta string goin'.

As J. June keeps shooting, his father proudly watches, now oblivious to Norm's presence.

JUNIOR
Sure can fill the hole, can't he?

NORM
How about filling it up with Ethyl?

JUNIOR
You done never laid your eyes on a prettier shooter.

Clearly, Junior will not move until Norm acknowledges this.

NORM
Not in the last day or so.

Junior glares at him and attends to the gas pump.

NORM
(continuing)
How far is Hickory from here?

(CONTINUED)

5 CONTINUED: (2)

JUNIOR
... What "interest" ya got in tha li'l ol' nowhere town?... Must be business... Sure cain't be pleasure.

No response from Norm.

JUNIOR
(continuing)
Well, I'm waitin'.

NORM
Business.

JUNIOR
What sort of business?

NORM
Teaching -- coaching the basketball team.

Junior nearly swallows his wad.

JUNIOR
You pullin' some slicker on me?

Junior waddles over to Norm and stares him down.

JUNIOR
(continuing)
Damn... You ain't the slickerin' kind. Where'd they reel you in from?

Norm takes over Junior's place at the pump and continues filling the car.

JUNIOR
(continuing)
Knew they were in bad trouble down there... But ol' Cletus must be plumb desperate.

Norm pulls out his wallet.

NORM
$2.13. Thanks for the service.

The ball rolls over in front of Norm. He stops it with his foot and picks it up. He looks at the basket as though he is going to shoot, decides against it and whips the ball back to J. June.

6 EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

HICKORY POPULATION 540. PULL BACK to reveal a sign nailed on a narrow covered bridge as...

The green Chevy passes through the dark space, plank floor rumbling, and over railroad tracks into the town square.

Among the landmarks are: the Hickory Volunteer Fire Department and City Jail, Rooster's Barber Shop, a General Store and Dry Goods. Beyond the square are the town's most imposing structures. One is a white clapboard church; the other, the high school gymnasium.

Flower gardens front the impressive square red brick structure next to a large sign boldly proclaiming HICKORY HIGH SCHOOL - HOME OF THE CORNHUSKERS - SECTIONAL CHAMPIONS 1931 - 32 - 41.

7 EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - DAY

Norm pulls into the parking lot, gets out of the car, straightens his tie in the window, and walks up the steps.

A wave of students comes out of the front door. Boys are dressed in jeans and T-shirts or overalls and the girls are in calico dress. Most are carrying lunch baskets. These are farm kids.

Bringing up the rear is a woman around thirty, MYRA FLEENER, whose attractiveness is winning the war with her efforts to blunt it.

NORM
Excuse me... ma'am. Could you point me to Cletus Summers' office?

Myra turns slowly and stares.

MYRA
You're not.

NORM
You were expecting someone different?

MYRA
(a beat)
Maybe younger.

NORM
Sorry to disappoint you.

(CONTINUED)

7 CONTINUED:

MYRA
I must have misunderstood Cletus. He said he was hiring someone who never coached high school before.

NORM
Just college.

Myra starts to speak. They hold each other's stare until:

NORM
(continuing)
If everybody is as friendly as you around here, country hospitality is going to get a bad name. I'm Norman Dale.

He holds out his hand. Myra hesitates, then shakes it once.

MYRA
Two doors down to the left.

8 INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

As he walks, Norm gazes at round framed photographs of past U.S. Presidents. Between Harding and Coolidge is a door stenciled CLETUS SUMMERS - PRINCIPAL.

Norm knocks and knocks. He slowly pushes the door open and sees...

9 INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

CLETUS, a small wiry old man is seated on the floor, his legs crossed, staring at the wall.

NORM
Uh... hello, Cletus.

Cletus comes to and slowly recognizes the person standing in front of him.

NORM
(continuing)
You all right? What are you doing down there?

Cletus stands unsteadily, puts on his wire-rimmed glasses and rubs his hands through his full white slicked-back hair.

9 CONTINUED:

CLETUS
Floatin'... Is what I'm seein' true? Norman Dale?

They shake hands.

CLETUS
(continuing)
Wouldn't have recognized you.

NORM
It's been about twenty years.

CLETUS
Spring of '31. Buffalo State Teachers College... God. It was hell trackin' you down.

NORM
Here I am.

CLETUS
And so quick. Wasn't it yesterday or the day before we settled this thing?

NORM
You said practice started last week. I'm anxious to get going.

CLETUS
S'been awhile for you.

NORM
... Look... I really appreciate...

CLETUS
Let's not be repeatin' ourselves. Your slate's clean here. We got a job to do.

Cletus puts his arm around Norm and walks him outside to...

10 INT. HALL - DAY

CLETUS
Four classrooms, four levels, four teachers -- a good old-fashioned 4-R education. The best there is.

NORM
4-R?

10 CONTINUED:

CLETUS
Readin', writin', 'rithmetic, and roundball.

Cletus chuckles at his own joke.

CLETUS
(continuing)
A long sight from Buffalo, huh?

NORM
More than just miles.

CLETUS
Small town life may be just your bacon. Most of the people around here are decent Christian folk. Mind you, basketball makes 'em crazy, but as long as you're winnin', they'll be sweet on you.

NORM
That's the way it is anywhere.

CLETUS
Son, high school basketball in Indiana ain't anywhere.

Cletus swings open two magnificent doors, smiling proudly.

11 INT. HICKORY GYM - DAY

CLETUS
This is where it all happens.

A grand sight. Not big, but grand. Light from the balcony windows illuminates a gleaming lacquered floor with bold block lettering, HICKORY, imprinted on either end.

On the walls, pictures of former teams, pennants claiming sectional championships. Flags: U.S. and Indiana hang from the ceiling.

CLETUS
(continuing)
This ain't exactly what you're used to. Seats 750... Year ago down at Franklin, the school and gym burned down. The next week, they passed the hat and raised $100,000 to rebuild the gym. A year later, they did the same for the school and collected about half.

11 CONTINUED:

NORM
When does practice start?

CLETUS
Well, a couple of boys got to get ready for a threshin' on Saturday, so we're practicin' at noon the rest of the week.

A taut, angular boy wearing blue jeans and a T-shirt and carrying a ball under his arm walks through the front door.

CLETUS
(continuing)
Jimmy, want you to meet someone.

JIMMY stops. Norm holds out his hand.

CLETUS
(continuing)
Yes, this is...

Jimmy walks by without waiting to hear the rest. He begins to shoot at the far basket.

NORM
Real friendly town you got here.

CLETUS
It can be. Let's go on out to the place we got fixed up for you and get you squared away.

Norm stares at the metronome motion of the boy. He doesn't miss.

NORM
If the rest of the bunch can shoot like him, I'm in good shape.

CLETUS
They don't.

12 EXT. SUMMERS' FARM - DUSK

Three buildings, a central farmhouse with a wide porch, a faded rust colored barn, and a smaller simple framed house. In front, spreading expansively as far as the next set of ridges a mile away, are cornfields. From behind the bar, Cletus and Norm walk carrying bushel baskets. Norm gingerly holds his hog scrapple in front of him.

CONTINUED:

CLETUS
... And he decided not to play on the team when Coach Tidd died. He was kinda like an ole man to him... Jimmy don't have a real family to speak of. He still shows up at school and still shoots buckets every day. But, 'sides that, he's pretty much pulled back from everything else.

NORM
You go on about this kid like he's irreplaceable. It's my experience no one is irreplaceable.

CLETUS
(grunts)
Somethin' fundamental you don't understand. Fifty years of watching the best this state's got to offer, these tired eyes have never laid sight on a better ball player than Jimmy Chitwood. Never!

They reach the hog pens and dump the scrapple. MILLIE, a hefty woman with a constant crimson flush, walks by. She holds up a large white rabbit to Norm.

MILLIE
(while walking)
Say hello to Chester. Say goodbye to Chester.

She disappears into the barn. Silence between the two men until...

CLETUS
Tell me again we're doin' the right thing.

NORM
(a long beat)
My time coaching brought me great pleasure and great pain. Last twelve years working the mill have brought me neither. It'll work out this time... or that's it... For good.

A BELL CLANGS.

13 INT. SUMMERS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Millie, clearing plates from the table. LOETTA, 16, is staring intently at Norm. Her simple prettiness is on the verge of blooming into something special.

NORM
That was delicious chicken stew.

MILLIE
Wasn't chicken. Was rabbit.

NORM
(blanching)
Rabbit?...

LOETTA
You married?

NORM
No.

LOETTA
Why not?

MILLIE
Loetta...

NORM
I was married at twenty-four, divorced at twenty-eight. Since then I've looked... just never found one... who'd put up with me.

LOETTA
You go out on dates?

NORM
Sometimes.

LOETTA
When you go out, where'd you go? Movie houses? There a bunch where you live? Nearest one from here is in Deer Lick, twenty miles away. I get to go maybe once a year -- if I'm lucky... Have you seen a television? Our cousin...

MILLIE
Loetta, leave him in peace. Isn't it about time you boys be gettin' to the meetin'?

NORM
What meeting?

(CONTINUED)

13 CONTINUED:

CLETUS
Just a... sort of... welcomin' committee. Some of the boys itchin' to meet you.

MILLIE
Cletus, you know how friendly those boys aimin' to be.

CLETUS
Millie... it's not personal.

MILLIE
(to Norm)
Truth is there was a lot of hollerin' about Cletus bringin' you in. James Tidd, rest his soul, put in twenty-two good years. Reckon most folks sorry anybody's takin' his place.

NORM
So, I'm the anybody they got.

CLETUS
It'll be painless.

14 INT. HICKORY CREEK COON HUNTER LODGE - NIGHT

A large looming face.

GEORGE
Last time you coached was twelve years ago where?

Norm has the look of being grilled and not liking it.

NORM
Ithaca, New York.

PULL BACK revealing the usual old boys' club lodge. Pool table, trophies, antlers, skins. Large hearth from fire burning. Among the thirty or so "boys" surrounding Norm in what looks very much like a serious interrogation are Sheriff ROY DOCKERETTE, husky, slow-speaking, wears his uniform proudly; barber RUSSELL "ROOSTER" RABUN, scrawny, mean-looking; GEORGE WAMPNER, lean, country handsome with jet-black hair, the town's principal businessman; and REVEREND VERNON DOTY, who looks and sounds like an oaf, but at the core, is blessed with a touch of backwoods poetry.

(CONTINUED)

14 CONTINUED:

GEORGE
What you been doing since?

NORM
Mostly working at a steel mill.

GEORGE
(nodding)
Steel mill.

George glances sharply at Cletus sitting away from the main group.

GEORGE
(continuing)
Well... looks like you're gonna need a little help. We've been pretty successful doing things in a certain way and I think we all want to keep it going. Since I've been running practices for the last couple of weeks, I'll help you out till you get your feet wet.

Norm's tension is building.

ROOSTER
I gotta say what I gotta say.

GEORGE
What is it, Rooster?

Rooster moves towards Norm.

ROOSTER
Husker's a pussyfoot name, gotta change it to Apaches. Apaches was meaner than a bunch of grizzlers in heat. Whatta you say? You with me or agin' me?

Everyone except Norm is ignoring Rooster. Sheriff Roy saves Norm from answering.

ROY
This town don't like change much. Now, Cletus had no choice but hire someone new when Coach Tidd passed away, and it's his "perogative" to do so... accordin' to school policy... without consultin' anybody else.

(CONTINUED)

14 CONTINUED: (2)

Roy looks over as does everybody else to Cletus. The Reverand leans forward.

REVERAND
We trust that you're a fine upstanding God-fearing man of Christian morals and principles who will set an example and standard of leadership for our boys. Tell me, do you believe in man-to-man or zone defense?

GEORGE
Zone defense is all we've played in the past and it's the only thing'll work this year. Our boys are too small.

ROOSTER
What you think, Coach? Hickory Apaches.

ROY
I ain't interested in talkin' defense and I ain't nuts about a coach comin' from a steel mill. Not to speak of being from a foreign territory.

REVEREND
State, Boy.

ROY
Don't matter. Point is we got as much chance as a pea-shooter at Shiloh unless we get Jimmy back playin' ball. He switches over to Sunville, that would be a calamity the likes this town's never seen.

GEORGE
Roy's right. Most of the boys been playin' together all their lives, but Jimmy's the jack to their rabbit. Part of your job is to talk him into playin' ball or...

Norm, fed up with it all, stands.

NORM
Gentlemen, it's been nice talking to you. Good night.

(CONTINUED)

14 CONTINUED: (3)

He immediately turns and leaves the room. The "boys" look on incredulously.

15 EXT. HALL - DAY

Between classes, Norm makes a concerted effort to intercept Myra.

NORM
You have a minute?

MYRA
(looking at her watch)
A minute? By all means.

NORM
(looking at his watch)
Do I start now?

MYRA
Heard the boys weren't real generous with you last night. Gave you a little open-pit roasting.

NORM
I keep forgetting there are only about fifty people in this town.

MYRA
This hicktown?

NORM
I didn't say that.

MYRA
But that's what you think.

NORM
I can see we're going to be friends.

MYRA
You probably want to talk about Jimmy.

NORM
Why would I?

MYRA
Haven't you been told you can't win without him?

(CONTINUED)

15 CONTINUED:

NORM
In the last 24 hours, too many times. What does it have to do with you?

MYRA
I sort of look after Jimmy and his brother. His mother is infirmed and his father passed away. They're our neighbors. And he...

NORM
It doesn't matter to me.

Myra looks perplexed.

MYRA
And I think it's a good idea he not play this year.

NORM
Fine...

MYRA
I'm glad to hear you feel that way. Well, your minute is up.

Myra turns and disappears through a door.

16 INT. HICKORY GYMNASIUM - NOON PRACTICE

Seven boys are going through a lay-up drill as George Wampner stands at center court, a whistle around his neck and a ball under his arm.

GEORGE
(clapping hands)
Pick the knee up, Everett. Switch sides.

Norm enters, stops, takes a whistle on a strap from his pocket and in a ritualized gesture puts it around his neck. He takes a breath and strides steadily toward George.

GEORGE
(continuing; to Norm)
There you are. We have a couple more warm-ups before we start scrimmage. Thought we'd go twenty minutes on, ten off, twenty on.

(CONTINUED)

16 CONTINUED:

Norm reaches for the ball George is holding.

NORM
I have a different schedule in mind.

GEORGE
Look, mister. These boys got a routine they're used to. You throw a new coach with new-fangled ideas at 'em, it might get 'em all confused. We'll ease into it real slow. Hell, our first game's less 'n two weeks away.

NORM
(still holding his hand out for the ball)
First, let's be real friendly here. My name is Norm. Second, your coaching days are over.

GEORGE
Look, mister, there's two kinds of dumb. The guy who gets naked, runs out in the snow and barks at the moon. And the guy who does the same thing in my living room. The first one don't matter... the second you're kinda forced to deal with.

NORM
Translate. Is that supposed to be some kind of threat?

GEORGE
Don't know why Cletus drug your ole tired bones in here. He musta owed you something fierce. Fact is... mister, you start screwin' up this team, I'll personally hide strap your ass to a pine rail and send you up the Monon line.

George drops the ball and stalks off. Meanwhile the boys have stopped their drill and are congregated in the background whispering among themselves. Norm motions them over.

16 CONTINUED: (2)

NORM
Huddle up.
(to himself)
Let me see the hand I've been dealt.

The group slowly moves toward Norm. RADE BUTCHER, the class talker, known for his frequent departures from reality. His brother -- WHIT, in a word, dumb. MERLE WEBB, at 6'0'', the tallest and best player here; is afraid he'll miss the Korean War. EVERETT FLATCH, built like a rock and about as conversant. STRAP LESTER, son of a Pentacostal preacher, not a proselytizer himself; smiles a lot for no apparent reason. BUDDY, George's son, good looking, cocky and a great ball handler. OLLIE MCPIKE -- short, frenetic and always there.

NORM
(continuing)
This is it? Seven players.

OLLIE
Just six really. I don't count.

NORM
How's that?

OLLIE
I'm too short and no good. I suit up for practices to be a body. Equipment managin's my trade.

NORM
I thought everybody in Indiana played basketball.

MERLE
Sir, most do, but not all go out for the team. We only have 42 boys in school. Before Coach Tidd passed away we had twelve. Three switched to Sunville and two quit, sir.

NORM
(shrugging)
A lonely bench... For those of you who don't know, my name is Norman Dale. I've coached 10 years of college ball, but it's been 12 years since I've blown this...
(holds up a whistle)
... so, I hope, in a way, to be learning from you as much as you learn from me.

(CONTINUED)

16 CONTINUED: (3)

RADE
I ain't no teacher.

Some laughter.

NORM
(ignoring the remark)
I'm going to be setting up practice a little different than you're used to... but as you'll find out everything will have a reason.

In the background, Buddy and Whit are snickering, talking above an audible level, ignoring Norm.

NORM
(continuing)
Basketball is a voluntary activity, not a requirement. If you don't like playing on the team, you're free to leave... You.
(pointing to Buddy)
You hear what I'm saying?

BUDDY
Sure... just curious to know when we start.

NORM
When I'm ready.

BUDDY
You just let me know.

Buddy turns to Whit and starts talking again.

NORM
(pointing to Buddy)
You, out of here.

BUDDY
Hey, man, what'd I do?

NORM
Don't come back until you're ready to shut up and listen.

BUDDY
Break my heart.
(to Whit)
Come on, let's fly this chicken coop.

(CONTINUED)

16 CONTINUED: (4)

Whit grins nervously.

BUDDY
(continuing)
Didn't you just say you'd rather be down at Sunville? Come on, this is a bunch a hang-doggers here.

Whit looks at his brother hoping for encouragement to stay.

RADE
Your funeral.

BUDDY
Let's move it, gizzard.

WHIT
I ain't no gizzard.

Whit sets his brow and starts walking with Buddy. At the door, Buddy turns.

BUDDY
Have fun, coach, trying to win with five... well...
(looks at Ollie)
... make that four players.

Norm stares the deserters out the door and turns to his remaining troops.

NORM
Let's begin.

Behind Norm, in the far corner, we see Jimmy staring through a windowed door.

17 EXT. SUMMERS' FARM - MORNING

Outside the barn, Norm is working on the engine of his Chevy. Loetta walks by with a large box.

LOETTA
Wanna take a walk?

NORM
No, thanks. Don't have the time. Where you headed?

LOETTA
Food for the General.

(CONTINUED)

17 CONTINUED:

NORM
The General?

LOETTA
Grandpa. He lives on the far side of that ridge over yonder. Hasn't left his house for two years.

NORM
From what I've seen of this place, not a bad choice.

LOETTA
He and pa got in a fight... over sellin' the bottom land. The General said he wouldn't take a step out the door 'til pa apologized.

NORM
And your dad not being a stubborn man...

LOETTA
Won't talk about it.

NORM
(motioning up the hill)
You better go on.

LOETTA
You have a special girl back in Buffalo?

NORM
A while back.

LOETTA
My boyfriend Buddy 'n me broke up. After I heard about him walkin' out 'n everything. Always figured he was too immature for me anyway.

She turns and heads up the hill.

18 INT. HICKORY GYM - PRACTICE - DAY

A WHISTLE BLOWS. Six figures are racing from one end of the court. Ollie trips and falls after a few strides.

(CONTINUED)

18 CONTINUED:

Everett, all 220 pounds of him, has a difficult time stopping, and bounces off the padded wall. Totally unaffected, he turns around and calmly walks back to his gasping teammates.

Norm just shakes his head.

NORM
Let me be very clear what we're after here... Team, Team, Team. Five players making one functioning unit. Five pistons powering one machine... no one more important than the other... Now... I've seen some of you guys can shoot. You've been doing it all your lives. You do it every day without me -- but with me, you're going to learn how to be a team... For the next six practices until our first game, we'll be concentrating on defense and ball handling.

OLLIE
No scrimmages?

NORM
None. And no shooting either.

Groans.

OLLIE
That's no fun.

NORM
My practices aren't designed for enjoyment.

19 SERIES OF CUTS.

Norm's serious.

Pairs of players criss-cross passing, running up and down the court. Balls and people are bouncing off each other.

Dribbling drills between chairs set up on the floor. Falls and frustration.

Two on two positioning drill without the ball.

We see Norm, in his element, alive now for the first time, motioning, demonstrating, pushing, and when they finally get it right, giving a satisfied pat on the back. A pro at work.

20 INT. HICKORY GYM - DAY

A bedraggled group gathers around Norm.

RADE
(plaintively)
One shot. Just give me one shot.

Norm throws him the ball. Rade puts it up from about ten feet away. The shot falls five feet short.

RADE
(continuing)
I'm plucked out.

NORM
Not yet. Tip drill.

The players look at each other. Who is this guy?

21 EXT. HICKORY MAIN STREET - LATE AFTERNOON

Cletus and Norman exit the General Store.

NORM
You'll never get me in a pair of those overalls.

CLETUS
Oh, I believe you'll come around.

George is walking on the opposite side of the street. He looks over and glares at Norm.

CLETUS
(continuing)
They'll be right behind you when you start winnin'.

NORM
If that's what it takes -- who cares?

CLETUS
You never were much for carin' whether people like you or not.

Norm doesn't respond.

CLETUS
(continuing)
How does it feel... being out there blowing the whistle again?

(CONTINUED)

21 CONTINUED:

NORM
(hesitating; looking for the words)
... Good.

A disheveled, weaving FIGURE appears suddenly in front of them. He's wearing a fur stovepipe hat and a long army coat.

SHOOTER
Cletus, my friend, my good friend, my friend of years, my friend of tears. You're lookin' fine a' fettle.

CLETUS
This is Norman Dale, our new coach. Wilbert "Shooter" Flatch.

Shooter pretends to dribble a ball.

SHOOTER
Clete, you tell him. Sectionals in '33. One point down -- 5... 4... 3... 2... 1.

He shoots, looks expectantly at the imaginary rim. His face falls.

SHOOTER
(continuing)
In and out.

He puts his arm around Norm and whispers.

SHOOTER
(continuing)
I was fouled.

In a sudden change of gear, he focuses on Cletus.

SHOOTER
(continuing)
The missus and myself had a partin' of the ways on a small matter.

Cletus reaches for his wallet and hands Shooter a quarter.

SHOOTER
(continuing, winking)
A friend, a fine friend...

As Shooter is about to stuff the coin inside his coat, a hand grips his wrist.

(CONTINUED)

NUED:

walks around and stands directly in front of Rade Whit.

NORM
(continuing)
I'm going to say this only one time... All of you have the weekend to think about whether you want to play on this team under the following condition... What I say when it comes to the basketball team goes, absolutely and without discussion.

41 INT. BARN - LATE AFTERNOON

Norman is sitting on a hay bale -- his back against the wall, an opened book by his side as he gazes off into space. Loetta peeks her head inside.

LOETTA
Saw you comin' in... wondered how you're doin'... You probably don't want to talk, huh? I'll leave... some other time. Okay?

NORM
Okay.

Loetta's head disappears and reappears.

LOETTA
You're not leavin' town?

NORM
Not unless forced to... Which could be any time now.

LOETTA
Hickory's not like you thought it'd be, huh?

NORM
I guess I did imagine things would be different...

LOETTA
The General says it's too early to be callin' in the dogs.

Norm looks at her quizzically.

(CONTINUED)

21 CONTINUED: (2)

Everett wrenches his father's clenched fist open.

EVERETT
Give it.

SHOOTER
(forlornly)
Just two bits.

Everett squeezes harder until the coin drops to the ground. Everett picks it up and hands it to Cletus. His eyes are lowered.

CLETUS
Sorry.

EVERETT
Ain't your fault.

Everett grabs his father's arm and virtually drags him across the street.

SHOOTER
(protesting)
Just two bits. He's my friend, a fine friend... a friend of years...

And they're gone. Norm looks on, moved.

22 INT. HICKORY GYM

Sweating, frustrated faces. Bodies hitting bodies. Two on two trap drill. Mistakes. WHISTLE BLOWS.

NORM
We'll do this until the end of practice, then do it again on Monday and every day next week till you get it right.

OLLIE
Seems like we're in the army.

NORM
You are in the army -- my army -- every day from 3:00 to 5:00.

A tired, bent over Merle immediately stands at attention. The others notice and mimic him. Rade salutes Norm.

23 ANGLE - DOOR

A group of around ten men make their way through a side exit and seat themselves in the lower bleachers. We recognize Sheriff Dockerette and Rooster.

Norm immediately walks determinedly across the floor toward the men in the bleachers.

NORM
(calm, but percolating inside)
What can I do for you gentlemen?

ROY
Just checkin' the boys out.

ROOSTER
We heared you got some pig crazy ways of coachin'. No shootin'? Practicin' without a ball? That a fact?

ROY
We got some concern about the way matters are being handled here. When two of your best ball players walk off and you hear of others complainin'. Well...

NORM
Basketball here is a voluntary activity. For now, I want no distractions. Practices are closed to outsiders.

ROY
Outsiders?

ROOSTER
Coach Tidd never closed no practices.

ROY
(an edge)
I ain't so sure you're in your rights.

A loud BANGING on the door stops everyone cold. The door shakes for a moment, then pops open.

A very large man, ROLLIN BUTCHER, strides forcefully across the floor. Clenched in his right hand is Whit, who looks like he's rather be anywhere else. The closer the man gets, the larger he looms.

(CONTINUED)

23 CONTINUED:

ROLLIN
Where do I find me the coach?

Without great conviction, Norm steps forward.

ROLLIN
(continuing)
My boy's got somethin' to say.

Swinging Walt directly in front of Norm, Rollin lifts his son's lowered chin.

WHIT
(halting, rehearsed)
Sorry about walkin' out... would sure be obliged if I got me another chance.

He stops, turns to his father, smiling wanly. Rollin squeezes his arm urging him to continue.

WHIT
(continuing)
Won't happen again... you're... the boss.

Norm looks somewhat relieved.

NORM
We got another hour of practice. Go suit up.

Whit looks at his dad who nods. Whit runs toward the locker room.

ROLLIN
My boy gets a little mixed up from time to time. You get any trouble from Rade or Whit, you let me know.

Norm nods.

ROLLIN
(continuing; turning)
What are you boys doing here?

ROY
The coach here was just explainin' he's closing practices to outsiders. That means us. Now, Rollin, you ever heard such a thing?

(CONTINUED)

23 CONTINUED: (2)

Rollin walks over to seated men and looks down at them.

ROLLIN
This man's got a job to do. He wants you out of here... I best believe you should be on your ways.

Rollin points to the exit.

ROLLIN
(continuing)
Any contrary feelin's?

ROY
Well, we was aimin' to...

Roy just can't seem to finish his sentence. He finally stands and heads out followed by the rest, most reluctantly by Rooster. The team has been watching the incident, frozen in place. When Norm turns around, they quickly are back in motion.

24 EXT. BUTCHER CORNFIELD - EARLY DAWN

A transparent dew-mist hovers over a rolling cornfield. In silhouette, we see a small GROUP, about twenty, form a haphazard semi-circle around a man standing on a flatbed truck. There is no mistaking the Reverend's sonorous and dramatic voice.

REVEREND
The earth is the Lord's and fullness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein. Man dwells therein, therefore he is part of the fullness and like it he is eternally important, eternally changing and imperishable. Bless these men, Lord, and take the work they are about to do as an offering of faith and expression of your glory. Amen.

GROUP
Amen.

VOICE
Move it out.

25 SERIES OF SHOTS

Tractors pull flatbed trailers alongside rows of corn as men and boys cut the stalks with long handled knives. Others follow, putting the cut corn on the trailers.

We see most of the basketball team, including the Chitwood brothers, Jimmy and J.P. -- they work as a unit.

Rollin showing a perplexed Norm how to use a corn knife.

Norm lagging behind as the rest of the group move down rows ahead of him.

Everett trading places with Norm who now tosses the fallen stalks.

The sun rises higher.

Sweat, cuts, sore hands.

26 EXT. GROVE OF TREES - DAY

Lunch break. Norm is seated by himself against a tree. He looks beaten. Ollie appears with a gallon jug.

OLLIE
(handing Norm the jug)
Drink. Make you feel like somebody pumped you full of Ethyl.

Norm hesitates, shrugs, and takes a long pull. His eyes begin to water as he shakes his head trying to clear it.

NORM
(strained voice)
What's in there?

OLLIE
Sassafras whiskey and coca elixir. Doesn't taste too good, but it'll put so much work in you... have to be tied down when the sun drops.

Suddenly, George appears. He and Norm give each other looks.

A WHISTLE BLOWS.

27 EXT. CORNFIELD

In the field: Rollin tossing Norm some gloves. He gingerly puts them on.

Jimmy staring poker-faced at Norm's bent over figure.

Rade driving a tractor, yelling back a stream of talk while driving into and smashing the uncut corn, nearly taking a few workers in the process.

More sun, more sweat.

Standing corn diminishes.

Finally, as the sun sets long in the sky, Rollin drives by and motions Norm onto a tractor. They drive across the cut field to the silo.

28 EXT. BUTCHER FIELD - DUSK

Rollin and Norm look out over the amber-colored valley.

ROLLIN
Invite was for tonight only. You put in a hell of a day's work. I'm appreciatin' it.

NORM
I owed you.

ROLLIN
Bull.

NORM
I thought they had machines to do this kind of work.

ROLLIN
You thought right. I'm just one of those old mules tryin' to keep threshin' days alive.

NORM
What for?

ROLLIN
Just like the way things been... afraid what they could be.

NORM
Tradition?

(CONTINUED)

28 CONTINUED:

ROLLIN
... More 'n that. Framin's not changed much in a hundert years. Since the war, it'd make your head spin. Those big four row corn pickers and shuckers just serve man's own land manipulatin' reach. Our little hundert acre farms all of a sudden too small, too "inefficient."

The sun drops behind the horizon.

ROLLIN
(continuing)
Gettin' cold... Seems like yesterday walkin' through the fields you could hear the corn snap and rustle as it grew.

The fields are deep purple and silent.

29 INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

The room suggests history and civics are taught here. Norm, with bandages on his hands, walks in.

NORM
(looking around the room)
Are we missing some people?

Silence. Norm counts.

NORM
(continuing)
I count four short.

Finally:

RADE
Merle and Roy's post-hole diggin'. Fence got tore up. Cattle's gettin' out.

NORM
I can't think of a better reason to miss class.

OLLIE
My ol' man says the only reason to go to school after learnin' how to read and figure is to play ball.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

29 CONTINUED:

OLLIE (CONT'D)
(playing to the rest of the students)
Since I'm not so good, I been wonderin' at times what I'm doin' here.

Laughter.

NORM
... There are others missing.

RADE
Next time you lay eyes on Buddy, he'll be puttin' points on the visitor's board. He's done transferred to Sunville.

30 INT. CLETUS' OFFICE - DAY

Myra is leaning over Cletus' desk going over some papers with him. They are startled by Norm's sudden entrance.

NORM
What the hell is going on here? How can someone transfer two months into the term just to play basketball? What kind of hillbilly rule is that?

MILLIE
Hillbilly, Mr. Dale?

NORM
Will you excuse us, Miss Fleener?

Norm practically shoves Myra out the door.

CLETUS
You got a class to teach.

NORM
Keeps going on like this and there may not be enough players to field a team.

CLETUS
You keep going on like this, you might not be around for it to matter.

(CONTINUED)

30 CONTINUED:

His remark puts Norm on hold.

CLETUS
(continuing)
Maybe I was wrong. Maybe some ills can't be cured.

Norm holds his look.

NORM
If I'm going to play under these conditions...

CLETUS
Never promised a bed o' lilies... only a chance. And from where I'm sittin', it don't seem you got a lot of time left...

Cletus opens the door for Norm to leave.

CLETUS
(continuing)
Go teach your kids.

31 EXT. SCHOOL - DUSK

A wind is whipping some leaves around the mostly deserted parking lot. Norm pulls a coat around his neck as he exits the gym. He sees Myra exit the school. Both do a little avoidance-coming-together dance. They reach their cars at the same time.

MILLIE
You get the rules straight?

NORM
Yeah. Thanks for your concern.

They both see in the b.g. Jimmy shooting baskets at a goal at the side of the school. There is silence between them as they stand beside their respective cars, staring at Jimmy drill one basket after another.

NORM
(continuing)
Pretty shooter.

MILLIE
Leave him alone. Jimmy's still grieving over Coach Tidd.

NORM
You don't have to convince me.

(CONTINUED)

31 CONTINUED:

MILLIE
He's a special kid. I have great hopes for him. If he keeps working I can get him a scholarship to Wabash College and he can get out of this place.

NORM
If Jimmy is as good as everyone says he is, why wouldn't a basketball scholarship make more sense?

MILLIE
Open your eyes. Who would ever see him play? The only thing that comes in to Hickory from the outside is the train... and it's here for all of five minutes.

NORM
Tell me, Miss Fleener, why so unfriendly? What have I done to you?

MYRA
(hesitates)
There seems something wrong about you being here. This town doesn't even appear on most state maps. A man your age who makes a choice to come here suggests a person who is running from something or has nowhere else to go.

NORM
Why I'm here has nothing to do with you.

MYRA
Just make sure you leave Jimmy alone. I don't want him coaching in Hickory when he's fifty.

Norm stares at her for a beat, turns, then crosses the parking lot to...

32 EXT. HICKORY SCHOOL - DUSK

Norm watches Jimmy put on a magic show with the ball. Like a yo-yo on a string, it goes out, comes back, up, swish, swish.

(CONTINUED)

32 CONTINUED:

Norm is suddenly there, under the basket, to rebound for him and throw the ball back after he bottoms it out. From Jimmy, there is nary a gesture of acknowledgment. Finally...

NORM
Didn't see you in class today. Any reason you want to tell me about?

Apparently not. Shoot -- Swish. And again. Different try.

NORM
(continuing)
In the ten years I coached basketball, I never met anyone who wanted to win as badly as I did... I would do anything I could to increase my advantage. And if anybody blocked the pursuit of that advantage, I pushed them out of the way... without caring who they were or why they were there. But... that was then... You have a special talent -- a gift. Your gift -- not the school's, the townspeople's, the team's, Myra Fleener's, or mine. Yours. To do with what you choose because that's what I believe, I can tell you -- I don't care whether you play on the team or not.

Jimmy stops shooting, looks at him (finally) for a beat and resumes shooting. In the b.g. observing and listening is Myra.

33 INT. HICKORY GYM - DAY

Pep Rally smalltown Indiana style.

Colored chiffon streamers flow down one side of the gym. The bottom half of the bleachers is filled with the entire school population of Hickory, grades one though twelve. About 150 in all.

In the upper section are townspeople. Some are recognizable.

(CONTINUED)

Loetta and other cheerleaders are earnestly trying to build some enthusiasm with the help of a scaled-down version of a band -- bass drum, trumpet, two trombones and a cymbal.

The players, all dressed in warm-up suits, are seated next to Norm.

Cletus is standing in front of a wobbly, softball-shaped microphone.

CLETUS
Please make feel welcome our new coach, Norman Dale.

The introduction elicits a mixed response at best. Some high shrilled noise from the cheerleaders, polite applause and a few scattered boos.

Norm rises and accepts his place in front of the microphone.

NORM
First of all, I want to thank those of you who have made me feel so welcome here.
(he looks at Myra in the stands and smiles)
The boys and I are getting to know each other. Seeing what we are... what we can be. So far, I like what I see and I'm excited to be a part of Indiana basketball... Here are the players.

As Norm goes back to his seat, each player runs down to the basket, shoots a lay-up and runs the ball back to the next player in line. Some like Everett are straight and businesslike, others, Ollie and Rade specifically, showboat the crowd.

CHEERLEADERS
Rade, Rade, he makes the grade.
He's a Hickory Husker.

By the time we get to...

CHEERLEADERS
(continuing)
Ollie, Ollie, by gosh, by golly.
He's a Hickory Husker.

33 CONTINUED: (2)

A low murmured chant starts somewhere in the school section. "We want Jimmy." By the time the introductions are over, the chant has picked up strength in the upper section. Rooster is most vocal. "We want Jimmy."

Norm approaches the microphone and holds his hand up. The chanting starts to diminish as he stares the crowd down.

NORM
These six individuals have made a choice. A choice to work, sacrifice, and put themselves on the line twenty-three nights in the next four months to represent you, this high school. That commitment and effort deserves, no, demands your respect. This is your team. We hope you support who we <u>are</u> -- not who we are <u>not</u>.

Myra's gaze follows Norm intently as he returns to his seat. There is an uncomfortable silence until Loetta moves to the microphone to lead a new cheer. The players look at each other uncertainly --and then at their coach. Jimmy, behind the windowed door, looks on.

34 INT. NORM'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Norm, dressed neatly in tie, sport coat, and slacks, is diagramming plays on the blackboard.

There's a KNOCK. The door opens and Myra steps in.

NORM
What now?

Myra stands in the door frame uncomfortably.

MYRA
I only have a minute.

NORM
(looking at his watch)
Your time must be precious. I don't suppose you're coming to the game.

(CONTINUED)

34 CONTINUED:

MYRA
If it were my choice alone, the answer would be no. But my mother hasn't missed a game in over thirty years.

NORM
I know -- you're here to wish me luck.

MYRA
Is luck what you're counting on?

NORM
I'll need all I can get.

Myra smiles to herself.

MYRA
I just wanted to tell you I thought you handled the situation today quite well.

NORM
You're here to compliment me.

Myra turns to leave.

NORM
I'll take it. Coming from you, it's a real chestnut.

Silence.

NORM
(continuing)
Don't worry. Your boy is free from my snares.

MYRA
That's not why I'm here...

NORM
I hear there's an Alan Ladd movie playing a half hour away. I'm free tomorrow night. How about you?

MYRA
(hesitating)
Mr. Dale, you are a very strange man.

(CONTINUED)

34 CONTINUED: (2)

She turns and walks down the hall.

NORM
(to himself)
I guess that means no.

35 INT. LOCKER ROOM - GAME NIGHT

Tension time. Deep breathing. Clenched fists; stretching. The boys, dressed in warm-up suits, are sitting in a loose semi-circle. Ollie is taping Everett's ankle. There is a DULL ROAR emanating from behind the gymnasium door which, at intervals, arcs and descends. Norm walks out of the bathroom.

MERLE
You all right, Coach?

NORM
(clearing his throat)
Yeah, fine. Remember -- discipline your game. Absolutely no shots unless we've passed it at least four times. Set the offensive pattern before you look to score. Do you have all that? Four times.

He holds up four fingers emphatically.

The door pops open. A WAVE OF SOUND comes flooding in, followed by Cletus and the Reverend. Cletus takes Norm off to the side.

CLETUS
How do you feel?

NORM
Like it's my first game.

CLETUS
In a way it is. I'll be right next to you.

The Reverend walks businesslike to the center of the group.

REVEREND
Let us pray.

Strap goes down on one knee.

(CONTINUED)

35 CONTINUED:

REVEREND
(continuing)
Be strong and of good courage; for the Lord thy God is with thee wither so ever thou goest. Lord bless these boys and the season before them.

The Reverend lifts his head.

The boys stand and try to encourage each other. All except Strap, who is still on the floor genuflecting. Merle grabs the ball and starts to head out the door.

NORM
Wait a second.

He crosses to Strap and bends over trying to gain his attention. Strap's eyes are closed.

NORM
We're ready, Strap.

Strap, deep in reverie, doesn't move. Norm looks up helplessly.

NORM
How long will this go on?

The boys apparently are used to this sort of thing.

RADE
He'll come when he's ready, not before.

NORM
Do you think that might be soemtime before the tip-off?

Rade shrugs.

NORM
(continuing)
Okay... Move it out.

And they do. Merle leads the five pumped up boys out of the locker room.

36 INT. HICKORY GYM - NIGHT

An EXPLOSION OF SOUND and light. Indiana High School Basketball. The small gym overflowing with unrestrained energy. Opposing walls of noise doing battle. Rapidly shifting waves of color.

(CONTINUED)

36 CONTINUED:

The boys go into their warm-up drill. They look a little ridiculous with only five players. Oolitic High School appears slick, lean; like a basketball team should. Norm stands by the door -- a little taken aback by the sensory overload. He looks into the crowd, sees Myra looking at him. She turns away.

WHISTLE. Huddle.

NORM
Olllie, take your warm-ups off. You're playing till Strap gets here -- if he ever makes it.

OLLIE
I'll go get him.

Just then Strap bursts througoh the door, joins the huddle and nods at Norm as if nothing happened.

NORM
(a little shaky)
Okay. Four passes minimum before you shoot. Think as a machine. Five pistons. Firing together. Machine. Say it together.

Norm puts his hands out. They look at him strangely and Merle, finally getting it, follows suit. Other hands slowly join. They look at each other out of the corner of their eyes.

TOGETHER
Machine.

Break. Ollie sits on the bench arranging his waterbucket and towels next to Norm and Cletus, who is serving as assistant coach -- statistician. Oolitic controls the center jump and immediately scores. Hickory brings the ball up and goes into one of their drill formations. They pass. And pass, and pass. Oolitic steals the ball and scores. Again the same pattern. The Hickory fans seem befuddled. From the crowd, "Shoot the ball." "This isn't keep away."

The team is unsure, awkward. Occasional helpless looks toward the bench. Halftime score Oolitic 28-8.

37 INT. LOCKER ROOM

Players drinking water, toweling off.

(CONTINUED)

37 CONTINUED:

NORM
More pressure on the passing lanes. Your defense is awful.

RADE
What about our offense? We can't win unless we score.

NORM
I want you to keep your mouth closed unless you're asked to open it.

The door opens bringin in Roy Dockerette.

ROY
(whispering rather loudly)
What kind o' winged-nut stunt you tryin' to pull out there? Chrissakes, mister, let 'em run and shoot like they always done.

Norm angrily walks over.

NORM
Get out. Now.

Cletus walks in and, recognizing the situation, grabs Roy's arm.

CLETUS
Come on, Roy.

ROY
Well, what about this embarassin'...

CLETUS
Later.

Cletus pushes Roy out the door and turns back to Norm.

CLETUS
(continuing)
I'm tryin' to believe real hard you know what you're doin'.

38 INT. GYM - NIGHT

Fourth quarter score 43-17. Huddle. Crowd is impatient and letting the coach know it.

(CONTINUED)

38 CONTINUED:

NORM
Your defense was better this quarter.

Heads are down. The bodies are slumped, tired.

STRAP
I got four fouls and no points.

OLLIE
Don't foul out.

WHIT
When are we gonna play our game?

Norm grabs Whit by the arm and squeezes hard.

NORM
(voice impatiently rising)
Don't you numbskulls hear me when I'm talking? No one, I repeat no one, talks unless I say so.

Norm releases Whit's arm and the team breaks.

CLETUS
Thes boys not used to being yelled at like that.

NORM
That's the way I coach.

CLETUS
That's what I'm afraid of.

NORM
Cletus... I want you out of our huddles.

CLETUS
Don't be goin' south on me.

39 ANGLE

On the floor a Hickory player is fouled. Rade calls the team around the free throw line for an impromptu meeting.

RADE
Time to score some points, boys.

(CONTINUED)

39 CONTINUED:

MERLE
I'm not violatin' orders.

WHIT
Let's try to win.

The next possession, Rade quickly moves the ball up the court and, without passing, shoots and scores. Norm doesn't react. The same thing happens again -- this time Whit doing the shooting. The crowd sensing a change, picks up in spirit. Norm calls time out. Cletus stays seated away from the huddle looking quite concerned.

NORM
Next person shoots without the ball being passed four times comes out of the game.

OLLIE
You don't...

A withering look from Norm stops him.

On the first play, Rade comes down, fakes a pass and shoots. A beautiful shot, it goes in.

NORM
Ollie. Go in for Rade.

Ollie doesn't react.

NORM
(continuing)
Move!

Ollie, with great trepidation, strips down and motions to Rade. Rade returns to the bench, averting Norm's eyes. Norm moves over quickly to Rade, looking like he might strangle him. He decides otherwise, takes a deep breath, and returns to his seat.

On the floor, Whit dribbling the ball, looks over at his brother on the bench. Everett comes up behind him and knocks the ball out of bounds.

Everett stands in front of Whit.

EVERETT
You shoot that ball and yer gizzard'll have new teeth.

Whit doesn't need to be convinced.

(CONTINUED)

39 CONTINUED: (2)

Strap fouls an Ootlilic player. His fifth foul. He walks to the bench as Rade stands up ready to go in.

NORM
(to Rade)
Where are you going?

RADE
We gotta have five on the floor.

NORM
Sit down.

Rade looks at Norm, shakes his head and sits down.

The HORN sounds. The REFEREE crosses to Norm.

REFEREE
Need one more, coach.

NORM
My team is on the floor.

The ref shrugs and turns around.

CLETUS
What the hell's going on?

NORM
There's only four who want to play.

CLETUS
You can't...

Norm turns away from Cletus and sits down. When the ball is put into play and the crowd realizes what is happening, the outcry is predictable. Expressions of disbelief, anger, and for some, including Myra, amusement.

40 INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Norm locks the gym door. Four boys are still breathing hard, exhausted, spent. Norm moves quickly to their center.

NORM
Those on the floor played your guts out to the end... I'm proud of you.

(CONTINUED)

41 CONTINUED:

LOETTA
(continuing)
What are you doin' here?

Norm turns to where she has directed her question.

Buddy's dark outline is framed in the front door.

LOETTA
(continuing)
I told you not to come around.

BUDDY
Not here to see you.

LOETTA
(to Norm)
I wouldn't talk to traitors.

She brushes past Buddy in a huff and disappears out the door.

Neither Norm nor Buddy moves for a beat until Buddy comes in and sits down on a rusty tiller. A long space where it seems no one will talk. Finally, Norm breaks the ice.

NORM
How'd the game go?

BUDDY
Don't know.

NORM
You didn't play?

BUDDY
(shaking his head)
Couldn't... I went there... got dressed and all... when we had to go out on the floor... just couldn't do it.

Buddy stands up and looks at Norm.

BUDDY
(continuing)
I been shootin' baskets for Hickory since first grade. Don't seem right... in my gut, to be a Shiner the last year -- a team been tryin' to beat forever.

Buddy takes a long uncomfortable pause.

41 CONTINUED: (2)

BUDDY
(continuing)
I was hopin' you could see your way clear...

He stops and starts to go out the door.

NORM
If it's alright with Cletus, it's fine by me... Remember... a second chance...
(pauses)
... is the last chance you're allowed.

Buddy nods.

42 EXT. MAIN STREET - DUSK

Norm, staring at the red and white edifice of Rooster's Barber Shop, gathers himself and enters.

43 INT. BARBERSHOP - DUSK

Rooster, cutting Roy's hair, looks up in surprise. Roy glances at Norm and looks away.

ROOSTER
You here for a cut?

NORM
(not confidently)
Hear you're the only barber in town.

ROOSTER
(with a crooked grin)
Glad to oblige.
(pushing Roy out of the chair)
You through, jelly dog.
(to Norm)
Set yourself down here.

Norm tentatively approaches the chair and sits down. Roy sits on the sofa near the wall.

ROY
You r'call a time when we put four boys on the floor, Rooster?

(CONTINUED)

43 CONTINUED:

ROOSTER
(putting a sheet around Norm)
Got me there, Roy.

ROY
What you think. Maybe play three next time. Them's not bad odds. Three up against five.

Rooster, grinning maniacally has grabbed his scissors and starts toward Norm's scalp. Norm turns quickly.

NORM
You going to ask how I want it cut?

ROOSTER
Only cut one way.

NORM
How's that?

Rooster nods toward Roy. Roy's hair is about the same length as a GI's in boot camp. Norm's eyes widen as Rooster starts to take a chunk out of his hair. Norm moves quickly out of the chair.

NORM
(continuing)
Some other time.

ROOSTER
Hey, I ain't done.

NORM
Yes, you are.

Norm is out the front door and into the street.

44 EXT. HICKORY MAIN STREET - DAY

Norm feels his scalp to check the damage. Across the street he spots an OLD LADY loading a flatbed pickup with sacks of grain. He walks over and grabs a sack. The Old Lady, spry and feisty, has a face like a potato in late March.

OPAL
'Preciate it. Opal Fleener. Been hearin' plenty on you.

44 CONTINUED:

Myra walks out of the store.

MYRA
(overhearing)
Mother likes basketball.

OPAL
That's the truth, and then some.

Norm and Myra exchange wary glances. The last sack is loaded.

MYRA
Thank you... Mother, it's getting dark.

OPAL
(to Norm)
Sun don't shine on the same dog's ass every day, but, son, you ain't seen a ray o' light since you got here. I believe it's time we had a talk. Supper next Sunday... Around five'll do.

NORM
(looking at Myra)
I accept.

45 INT. NORM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Norm's is a simple, four-room house. Furnishings are rudimentary. Books piled in one corner, and unopened suitcase in the other, and a box-like radio on a dresser.

Norm is awkwardly holding a mirror and a pair of scissors in an attempt to cut his hair. There is a TAP on the window. He sees Shooter's grizzled mug pressed against the pane. Norm motions him around to the front door. Shooter enters, looking almost sober.

SHOOTER
I wouldn't trust the ol' Rooster, neither.

NORM
Isn't it a little late to be callin' on people?

Shooter spots the championship team picture on the wall, crosses to examine it.

(CONTINUED)

45 CONTINUED:

SHOOTER
Hell of a team you had there.

NORM
(surprised)
You know...

SHOOTER
I know everything there is to know about the greatest game ever invented.

NORM
What about... ?

SHOOTER
Don't matter. Now yer a'playin' Cedar Knob tomorrow. No one knows 'em better'n me.

Shooter sets his shotgun down and launches into his assessment. He becomes very animated, speaking quickly and hardly taking a breath.

SHOOTER
(continuing)
I'm a'seein' what yer doin'. Breakin' the colts. But, my friend, there's n way you can play all the way man-on-man. Got no head-toppers. Cedar Knob a bunch o' mites. Run ya off the boards. Squeeze 'em back in the point, make 'em chuck it from the cheap seats. And watch the purgatory they call a gym. No drives twelve foot in. That'll do.

And Shooter disappears as suddenly as he appeared.

46 EXT./INT. SCHOOL BUS - DAY

Bouncing along a dirt road, the team bus is followed by a string of twenty or so vehicles, mostly pickups. The bus is painted bright gold with bold block letters HICKORY CORN-HUSKERS along the side. Under the driver's door in handpainted white letters: In case of rapture bus will have no driver.

Strap's father, PREACHER PURL, is driving. Opposite of Strap's beautific repose, Purl is a constant whirlwind of energy. The boys, dressed in warm-ups, are scattered throughout the bus. Norm is next to Strap.

(CONTINUED)

46 CONTINUED:

NORM
How'd your father get this job?

STRAP
It's our bus.

NORM
Doesn't look like a preacher's bus to me.

STRAP
After sectional's over, we paint it white for summer tent shows. And every fall back to yella. I've painted this ol' crate maybe twenty times. Ever since his revelation.

Norm looks at his quizzically.

STRAP
(continuing)
God told him.

NORM
To paint the bus and drive the team?

STRAP
(nods)
That's the way it is.

47 INT. CEDAR KNOB GYM - NIGHT

Scoreboard reads: Cedar Knob 34-14. A tiny gym. The backboards are nailed to the walls. It is so crowded that spectators are standing on the playing floor. A Hickory player is slammed against the wall as he goes in for a layup.

Norm is sitting next to Cletus, Ollie and Strap, looking helpless.

NORM
(angry)
How can anybody play in this cracker box?

Shooter appears behind Norm and taps him on the shoulder.

(CONTINUED)

47 CONTINUED:

SHOOTER
(tapping again)
Their boy Nelson can't go to his left.

NORM
(turning sharply)
I can see that. I don't need your advice.

Shooter, wounded, retreats. Norm calls time out.

RADE
We can run on 'em, Coach... how 'bouta zone?

Norm and a few of the other players stare at Rade silently.

RADE
(continuing)
Sorry, Coach. Can't help my mouth.

NORM
Be sorry on the bench... Strap, you're in. Okay...
(pauses, thinking)
Buddy, press the ball between the front guards and pass it to Everett or Merle, cutting toward the bucket. Let's go.

48 SHOTS OF HICKORY

falling further behind. Suddenly, Merle gets smashed against the wall as he goes in for a lay-up. Norm jumps up and runs across the floor. Cletus unsuccessfully tries to stop him.

NORM
(to REFEREE)
That's a flagrant foul. That player should be out of the game.

REFEREE
He didn't do no wrong.

NORM
(turning away)
Hillbilly justice.

(CONTINUED)

48 CONTINUED:

REFEREE
You ain't been around these parts too long.

NORM
Long enough to know how to spot a homer ref.

The Referee puts his hands together indicating a technical foul. The opposing COACH joins the group.

CLETUS
He doesn't mean by anything.

COACH
What's goin' on?

NORM
Bad enough you got a cage for a gym. You got your team playin' like gorillas.

PLAYER
Who's a gorilla?

NORM
(pointing)
For one -- you.

PLAYER
(stepping toward Norm)
Bust off.

Out of nowhere, Rade's fist levels the Player moving toward Norm. The benches empty, but order is restored quickly.

REFEREE
(to Norm)
Don't know where they drug you up, but I ain't seein' you agin. Not this game no how. You're gone.

The Ref points to the exit. Norm walks with Rade off the court.

RADE
Got him a good one, didn't I, Coach?

NORM
You did.

He sits Rade down and heads toward the exit, ignoring Cletus' dagger-throwing eyes. Boos and catcalls cascade down on him, mostly from the home crowd, but some coming from Hickory fans.

49 EXT. DEER LICK COUNTY LIBRARY

As a pickup truck pulls up in front of a Georgian styled building, we see in the b.g. a typical Midwestern town square anchored by an impressive central courthouse. Size and activity suggests a considerably larger community than Hickory.

50 INT. LIBRARY

We see Jimmy handing the librarian a slip of paper. She walks him back to a section and leaves. Jimmy takes an armful of books and sits down at a table.

51 EXT. FLEENER BARN - FADING AUTUMN SUN

Myra is shoving round yellow stalks of sorghum into a cylindrical press. Norm is turning the handle and squeezing the juices into a long metal rectangle. Below are two black pots filled with burning wood. Opal stirs the steaming brown mixture with a wooden rake.

OPAL
Yer water boils over too easy.

NORM
There's been a lot of heat.

OPAL
Bringin' some it on yourself. Walkin' around with a how-the-hell-I-got-stuck in this hick town attitude. People ain't blind here. Nobody likes bein' looked down at and, son, you're lookin' down.

NORM
I'm looking to finish the season.

OPAL
This ain't no jail sentence.

MYRA
Mother, I'm sure Mr. Dale didn't come out here to get lectured.

OPAL
I've known him a week and I'm callin' him Norman. You've known him two months and it's Mr. Dale.

(CONTINUED)

51 CONTINUED:

MYRA
I'm not here to be lectured, either.

Norm is amazed.

OPAL
(grabs Norm's arm)
Tell me, boy, you seen the magic?

NORM
What do you mean?

OPAL
The boys. They got it. Don't matter what they're lookin' like now. If you see it, you can make it work. Tell me, son, is it there?

NORM
I'm not sure I know what you're talking about.

OPAL
(smiling to herself)
Don't know quite what it is yet. Hope you'll find out soon.

MYRA
Mother, I'm sure Mis...Norman didn't come out here to work.

OPAL
Sorghum comes fresh just once a year.

NORM
I've worked for my supper before.

OPAL
(checking the sorghum's consistency)
Needs more water.

MYRA
I'll get it.

OPAL
No you won't.

Opal grabs a bucket and disappears into the fading light. Norm and Myra stand in silence, side by side in synchronistic motion. Finally...

(CONTINUED)

51 CONTINUED: (2)

MYRA
When my brother was in high school every basketball game he played became the most important thing ever to happen to our family. Mother couldn't sleep the night before, and if they lost, my father would walk the floor till morning... It may seem odd to you... me growing up here... but I could never figure out why it all meant so much.

NORM
What are you doing here... living in Hickory?

MYRA
(a beat)
Mother needs me.

Norm almost says something. Silence.

MYRA
(continuing)
Haven't always been here. Went to college in Greencastle three years. Taught school in Indianapolis a while. Daddy died, Mother got sick. I came back.

NORM
And don't plan on leaving.

No response.

NORM
(continuing)
And never considered getting married? My guess is you've had plenty of chances.

Myra stops feeding the sorghum, walks over and starts raking the syrup.

MYRA
During those years away there were a few things I missed... not living here... The restful quiet at the end of a long summer day... Having things always fresh... milk, eggs, flowers... sorghum... and knowing people's private affairs would stay pretty much their own.

52 INT. FLEENER HOME - NIGHT

Roaring fire in the b.g. Dinner is about over.

OPAL
Now, ya pull this game out Friday night against Sunville, it would be giant right step to where ya gotta go.

Myra starts clearing plates.

OPAL
(continuing)
Excuse us, but I'm still nibblin'.

MYRA
It's getting late.

OPAL
Seven o'clock?

MYRA
We have work to do.

OPAL
Now it's we. She speakin' for you, Norman?
(before he can answer)
A wonder you two don't hit it off cleaner. She don't think much 'a life around here neither. But don't have enough spine to get out. Came runnin' home to Mama couple years back. Problem is Mama don't want her around waitin' on her like she's in some nursin' home. She's sure I'd just keel over and breathe my last if she weren't followin' after me every second.

Myra sets the plates back down with a bang.

MYRA
Thank you, Mother, and good night.

And she's gone.

53 EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DUSK

The team bus is travelling down a narrow country dirt road. Three or four cars follow.

54 INT. TEAM BUS - DUSK

A bouncy ride. Norm and Cletus sit together. The boys are scattered in the back.

NORM
Another hour on a dirt road?

CLETUS
Dirt roads keep this part of country clear.

NORM
That doesn't make sense.

CLETUS
Paved roads encourage people to drive on 'em. The wrong kind. We got paradise here and you can't see it.

NORM
Guess not.

The bus comes screeching to a stop, throwing Cletus and Norm forward.

PURL
Got a car wreck up here.

55 EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DUSK

The bus is halted in front of an overturned Amish buggy. Off the side of the road is a pickup truck, its front end smashed against a tree. Norm and Cletus are first out of the bus.

They approach a small group kneeling next to a motionless figure. Jimmy stands, a small cut over his eye.

NORM
You alright?

JIMMY
(nods)
My brother's hurt bad.

NORM
(to Cletus)
Get the med kit.

Cletus returns to the bus. Purl is by now next to J.P. and has his palms pressed to his forehead.

(CONTINUED)

55 CONTINUED:

PURL
Jesus, our healer, we ask of You in this time of need.

NORM
Not now, Purl.

Norm moves in, taking over. We see a man who knows what to do. Cletus returns with his bag.

NORM
(continuing)
Where's the nearest hospital?

PURL
In Linton, about thirty miles south.

NORM
I need towels, and a stiff back stretcher and transportation.

CLETUS
How bad is he?

NORM
Concussion and neck trauma -- possible fracture.

CLETUS
I'll go with him.

NORM
You can't handle this.

CLETUS
What about the game?

NORM
You take care of it. I'll try to make it.

Purl arrives with some towels. Norm starts to work stabilizing J.P.'s neck.

56 EXT. NEEDMORE GYM - NIGHT

A rickety pickup pulls into the parking lot as the Hickory team exits. Norm, sitting in the driver's seat, swings the truck around, stops and stares after the bus's disappearing taillights. Shooter taps on the window. Norm rolls it down.

(CONTINUED)

56 CONTINUED:

SHOOTER
How's J.P.?

NORM
He'll be fine. Mild concussion. Two days in the hospital at the most.

SHOOTER
We damn near won 'er tonight. Ol' Needmore weren't that good but George did a hell of a job.

NORM
George?

SHOOTER
Clete wasn't feeling too well, so George stepped in.

Norm grimly nods.

NORM
I better be heading back.

SHOOTER
Want company?

NORM
Got to take this crate back to Linton. Then hitch back to Hickory.

SHOOTER
I'm a pro at hitchin'.

Finally...

NORM
Hop in.

57 EXT. SUMMERS' BARN - DAY

Cletus and Norm are pushing a piece of farm equipment toward the barn.

CLETUS
Don't get on me about George. We had to make do best we could. And he does know his ball.

(CONTINUED)

57 CONTINUED:

NORM
I'm mostly concerned about consistency. I'm getting the feeling the boys are coming around.

CLETUS
A few wins provin' your feelin' wouldn't hurt.

Millie walks by, holding a large motionless turkey by its feet.

MILLIE
Say hello to Willie.

NORM
Goodbye, Willie.

As she disappears around the barn. They push the mulcher inside...

58 INT. BARN

... and they come to a halt.

CLETUS
Lot of people real taken by your helpin' J.P., givin' up the game. Just wonderin' why you never showed up at all.

Norm doesn't answer.

CLETUS
(continuing)
Gotta get some Indian corn up in the loft. Little Thanksgiving decoration.

He starts to climb a wooden ladder attached to the side of the barn wall. Norm tries to stoop him.

NORM
Let me get it.

CLETUS
Don't insult me.

He goes up past the wooden loft floor to a top shelving section.

(CONTINUED)

58 CONTINUED:

NORM
Be careful up there.

CLETUS
Here, catch.

Cletus starts throwing brightly colored ears of corn down to Norm. Suddenly, the top rung of the ladder he's holding gives way. He falls, crashing through the loft level to dirt floor below. Norm rushes forward to the still body.

59 INT. SUMMERS' KITCHEN - DAY

A huge cooked turkey is being carved by Norm. Sitting around the table feasting on the Thanksgiving plenty are Millie, Loetta. Norm fills a plate of turkey meat, leaves the table, and walks up the stairs to...

60 INT. CLETUS' BEDROOM

Cletus is lying in a makeshift gurney in a body cast. His leg, also in a cast, is propped up by a chain pulley.

CLETUS
Get that cursed fowl away from me.

NORM
You got to eat.

CLETUS
I'm not in a real Thanksgiving mood.

Norm sets the food down anyway.

CLETUS
(continuing)
Looks like I'll be laid up for at least rest of the season. Won't be help to you up here. 'Course, you're not too keen on acceptin' help anyways.

NORM
The only help I've learned to count on is my own.

CLETUS
You sound like that fella who raised me.

(CONTINUED)

60 CONTINUED:

NORM
The General?

CLETUS
Told you not to mention his name in this house.

NORM
(laughs)
Sorry. I forgot.

Norm turns to leave and is almost out the door when Cletus starts talking in a more subdued tone.

CLETUS
You know how he got his name?...

Norm turns back.

CLETUS
(continuing)
... was a Rough Rider down there in Cuba with Teddy. When the old World War cranked up, he was brought back to train the cavalry. Black Jack Pershing took a likin' to him... made him his right hand. Year after the war, Pershing came to town and gave him a Silver Star... General Pershing in Hickory. Biggest thing ever happened here, biggest ever will.

61 INT. DEER LICK LIBRARY - DAY

Jimmy (in different clothes) is opening a large book of bound newspaper -- Indianapolis Star 1939. He finally finds what he is looking for. The only headline we see is, "Coach Given Lifetime Suspension."

62 INT. GYM - AFTER PRACTICE - DAY

The boys, looking beat, are haphazardly gathered around, listening to Norm.

OLLIE
What are we doing out there?

NORM
Trying to develop to a place where we're a tough team to play against. If we do that, we'll win our share of games.

62 CONTINUED:

OLLIE
My old man says losers is the only ones talk about how winnin' don't mean nothin'.

NORM
... Okay. Showers. Everett, you stay.
(to Everett)
Where's your father?

Everett shrugs.

NORM
(continuing)
He usually contacts me at least a day before a game.

Everett nods.

NORM
(continuing)
Has he had a stretch recently when he has been off the bottle?

Everett shrug again.

NORM
(continuing)
Go on. Shower up.

Everett walks to the door and turns back.

EVERETT
He was sober for one summer about four years back... Didn't last.

63 EXT. DEEP FOREST - DAY

Norm is tramping around the thick, leafy forest floor, trying to get his bearings. He stops intermittently and yells.

NORM
Shooter!

A SHOTGUN BLAST goes off. Norm dives for cover.

NORM
(continuing)
Shooter! It's Norm.

Silence.

63 CONTINUED:

NORM
(continuing)
Norman Dale... Coach.

Silence. Then the SOUNDS OF BUSHES CRACKLING. Norm, whose hands are covering his head, finally looks up and sees Shooter. Shooter has seen better days.

SHOOTER
What are you doin' down there?

NORM
What happened to my scout? We play Verdi tonight.

Shooter's expression changes completely.

SHOOTER
I'll be a plum-sucking boon-doggler. Time's kinda flown the coop. Verdi, huh... We'll talk.

NORM
Here?

SHOOTER
Never seen the livin' quarters, huh? Come on up.

Shooter and Norm walk up the hill and come to a slight clearing. At the crest of the hill is an opening into the earth which is so small, they have to crouch to enter.

64 INT. SHOOTER'S DOMAIN - DAY

Once inside, however, a magnificent room presents itself. A large shaft of light beams from the ceiling. There is a couch, bed, chairs, and a large iron stove whose pipe reaches through the natural skylight.

SHOOTER
(proudly)
My domicile. Have a seat.

NORM
How can you live here?

SHOOTER
No problem. Been a man's home for a millenium. Stay's same temperature year round.

(CONTINUED)

64 CONTINUED:

Norm's eyes adjust to the light. He sits down, feeling carefully.

NORM
(pausing)
I've got a proposition to make... Cletus is going to be laid up for awhile. I want you to be my assistant.

SHOOTER
Tell ya anything you need to know.

NORM
You don't understand. I want you as my assistant coach. With me in practice, and on the bench during games.

Shooter gasps.

NORM
(continuing)
Only under the following conditions... You show up for practice every day on time and sober. You shave, clean yourself up, wear a suit to all games. The first time you have even a trace of liquor on your breath, you're finished. Understood?

Shooter is silent. Norm gets up, walks to the cave opening and turns.

NORM
(continuing)
Shooter... you can do it.

Shooter, in dark shadow, is silent.

65 INT. HICKORY GYM - VERDI VS HICKORY - NIGHT

The boys in battle. Pass, pass, pass, pass, and Rade shoots and scores. He looks at Norm, who nods his approval. The Verdi coach calls time out. The score-board reads: Hickory 34 Verdi 30.

66 ANGLE - SIDELINE

The boys huddle. Norm, excited, kneels between them.

(CONTINUED)

66 CONTINUED:

NORM
It's working now. Let's keep it up. Don't stop pressuring the ball. Shut down those passing lanes...

He suddenly notices the boys are paying no attention to him. They are staring at the strange man walking small, careful steps towards them. Shooter is barely recognizable. His face is shaved, his hair is plastered back. He looks like an uncomfortable prisoner of a black suit a few sizes too small for him. Everett's face is as ashen as his father's. The REFEREE blows a whistle to start the second half. The boys don't respond. The ref walks over.

REFEREE
You figure on playin' ball or not?

NORM
(to boys)
Let's go, guys.

They move slowly onto the court, looking back. Everett stands motionless until Norm pushes him toward the others. Shooter finally reaches Norm's side.

SHOOTER
(scared)
I'm not feelin' real good.

NORM
Just sit down. You'll be fine. The boys are getting it and it's fun to watch.

Play resumes. Shooter is trying not to shake. Roy Dockerette walks to the bench and leans down to Norm.

ROY
(loud enough for Shooter to hear)
Get that drunk off our team's bench.

NORM
He's stone sober.

ROY
Can't stop embarrassin' us, can ya?

(CONTINUED)

66 CONTINUED: (2)

Rollin pushes Roy away. As Shooter, his eyes darting rapidly, stands and runs quickly toward the locker room.

NORM
(to Rollin)
Take over.

Norm follows into the locker room.

67 INT. LOCKER ROOM

Shooter is throwing up. Norm wets some towels and puts them around Shooter's neck.

SHOOTER
Can't do it.

NORM
(wiping Shooter's face)
Their tall guard is giving us trouble.

SHOOTER
Larry Calvert? Can't dribble a lick with his left hand. Have Buddy force him to Rade's side. You been getting these boys to play defense.

As he talks, Norm guides him back out the door.

68 INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Ollie is standing and reading a recitation.

OLLIE
Progress is electricity, school consolidation, church remodelin', second farm tractors, second farm cars, hay balers, corn pickers, grain combines, field choppers and indoor plumbin'.

Students laugh. Norm chuckles.

Ollie beams proudly at Norm.

A BELL SOUNDS. The students scurry out of the room. Everett stands by the door, shifting uncomfortably, waiting for the last person to leave.

(CONTINUED)

68 CONTINUED:

NORM
What's on your mind?

EVERETT
(difficult time getting the words out)
What you doin' with my dad... well... I ain't seein' it.

NORM
Why not?

EVERETT
He's a drunk... He'll do somethin' stupid.

He starts to say something else, cannot, and turns.

NORM
When's the last time somebody gave him a chance?

EVERETT
(with emotion)
He don't deserve no chance.

Everett quickly exits almost knocking over Myra walking in. She appears uncomfortable.

MYRA
I've been asked, as acting principal, to inform you that a petition has been issued requesting a referendum on your removal as basketball coach.

Norm nods and walks over to the window. He watches students climb into the school bus.

MYRA
(continuing)
The vote will be made at a town meeting on Saturday.

NORM
(laughs quietly)
I guess that gives me Friday night's game to prove myself.

MYRA
It goes a lot deeper than one game.

(CONTINUED)

68 CONTINUED: (2)

NORM
(turning to her)
Yes. I suppose you're right. Well, I can guess one name that will be on that petition.

Myra tries to speak, but can't. Embarrassed, she turns and leaves.

The impact of the news hits Norm. He stares out the window.

69 INT. HICKORY GYM - NIGHT

Hickory vs Loogootee. On the bench next to Norm, looking a little less green, is Shooter. They watch the action intently.

NORM
We've got to move Rade to the weak side. Their left forward is too weak for him.

SHOOTER
(trying to concentrate on the game)
You're doin' good. Got the boys on track. Don't need me around.

NORM
You're wrong there.

SHOOTER
It ain't fair what they're doin'. The boys are just startin' to come around.

NORM
Stay with the game.

70 ANGLE

A Loogootee player steals the ball from Merle, clearly fouling him in the process. No call is made and the boy scores an easy layup. Norm stands up, takes a couple of steps on the court, and calls a time out. The REFEREE runs from under the basket, across to Norm, signaling a technical foul.

(CONTINUED)

70 CONTINUED:

REFEREE
On the playing floor while the game is in progress.

NORM
(calmly)
The ball was dead and I was calling a time out.

REFEREE
That's it. You're gone.
(pointing)
Out of the game. I'm puttin' you on file.

NORM
(exploding)
Are you crazy! Out of your mind.

MERLE
(to Ref)
Hey... He wasn't doin' nothin'.

The referee turns and walks away. Norm follows him.

NORM
What the hell is going on here? You can't do that. I'm stayin'.

Rollin comes on the court and pulls Norm away.

ROLLIN
Nothing you can do now.

Norm hesitates, caught between urges, then, finally turns to Shooter. Shooter's face drains of all blood.

NORM
Come on, Caveman. You can do it.

The boys are standing in loose formation, waiting for someone to come forward. Norm leads Shooter over to them.

NORM
(continuing; to the team)
Shooter's taking you on home. Pay attention!

Norm leaves. Shooter is sweating. He loosens his tie. Some of the fans are giving him a terrible time. He tries to kneel down and loses his balance.

(CONTINUED)

70 CONTINUED: (2)

Righting himself he starts to speak but nothing will come out. He looks around, panicked, stands up, turns and runs out the door. Everett's head drops. Rollin quickly lumbers over.

ROLLIN
(unsurely)
Okay... boys... let's get in there and... play tough.

The boys look at him, confused.

71 INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Norm sits on a bench in the empty locker room, staring at the floor. The MUFFLED crowd rises and falls in the background.

72 EXT. HICKORY GYM - NIGHT

As the disappointed fans empty out of the gym mumbling about another humiliating loss we see George with the referee walking toward the parking lot. Myra and Jimmy observe.

73 EXT. TRAIN STATION - DUSK

Norm is sitting on a crate on an empty loading dock.

MYRA
(appearing suddenly)
I used to come down here same time every day, and imagine I was riding out of here... I don't do that anymore.

NORM
(eyes her warily)
Does look tempting.

MYRA
Aren't you the type that would rather look for a fight that run from a fight.

Norm ignores her, clearly not in the mood for conversation. Myra pulls up another crate, sits down and pulls out a piece of paper.

(CONTINUED)

73 CONTINUED:

MYRA
(continuing; reading)
Norman Dale, Coach of the National Champions -- Ithaca Warriors -- was given a lifetime suspension, to be honored by all NCAA signatories, for physically assaulting his own player in Ithaca's last regular season game. This was the latest in a long series of controversial incidents involving the successful, though highly volatile, coach. The New York High School Athletic Association has stated that they will honor the suspension as well.

Myra puts the paper back in her purse. Norm looks straight ahead.

MYRA
(continuing)
It's clear why you're coaching here. No one else would have you.

Norm keeps staring at the empty tracks.

NORM
If you don't' mind I'd prefer to be alone.

Myra rises to leave.

MYRA
I must admit that your efforts in regards to Shooter have been noble... fine... And... I... appreciate your staying away from Jimmy.

Myra turns to leave.

NORM
How did you find out? Shooter?

MYRA
(turns back)
No... Jimmy.

Norm registers surprise.

NORM
How...

(CONTINUED)

73 CONTINUED: (2)

MYRA
I wouldn't suggest being there tonight. It won't be pleasant.

NORM
Thanks for the advice.

74 INT. CHURCH - NIGHT

The atmosphere is charged. George picks up the bible on the lectern and bangs it down trying to restore order. Reverend Doty grabs the impromptu gavel giving George a nasty glare. As we PULL BACK we see a group of one hundred or so riled up townspeople, and, in the back row, next to Millie, is Norm. Closer to the front are Opal and Myra. Myra clenches the folded paper in her hand.

GEORGE
Enough. We've been over all the arguments. Time to vote. Majority rules.

ROLLIN
Let the man speak.

OPAL
(standing, shouting)
Never seen a bunch of more narrow minded folks. I'm 'shamed...

Her words are drowned out by others.

ROOSTER
Get rid 'a him.

GEORGE
Talking about 'shamed, Opal. The coach of Hickory High School on file with the State Commissioner.

George shakes his head.

More noise.

75 EXT. CHURCH - NIGHT

The boys are standing and sitting outside the front door. Loetta is pacing. Ollie is on a ladder listening through a crack in the stained glass window.

(CONTINUED)

75 CONTINUED:

MERLE
Gotta count for something... if we go in as a team.

OLLIE
Don't mean nothing... We ain't votin' age.

MERLE
Everett?

Everett is sitting off to the side by himself.

MERLE
(continuing)
He only meant right by your pop.

Everett gets up and walks off.

MERLE
(continuing)
Rade... Whit?

Whit looks at his brother for guidance.

RADE
He's alright... wish he'd let us shoot more.

OLLIE
Don't make much difference. Since Jimmy's not playin' we ain't goin' to be all that hot anyhow.

Merle looks over at Strap, who's lying on his back staring at the stars. Merle shakes his head in resignation.

76 INT. CHURCH

More heat.

PREACHER PURL
(to the Reverend Doty)
We ain't preachin' the same gospel.

REVEREND DOTY
Never figured we were, Purl.

Preacher Purl pushes past him and practically shoves George out of the way to take over the lectern.

76 CONTINUED:

PREACHER PURL
Coach Dale's got a right to speak his peace.

More noise.

ROY
(from the back)
Let's vote.

Purl glares back at Carl. A beat, then Carl nods to George.

GEORGE
(not happy about it)
He's got two minutes.

The crowd hushes and turns around waiting for Norm. Norm sits there staring ahead. Millie shakes him.

MILLIE
(an order)
Get up there -- right now.

Norm turns in surprise at Millie's demand. After a beat he nods, stands and walks up the aisle to the lectern.

NORM
I'm not up here to ask you to keep me on. You do what you have to do. I've made mistakes but they're mistakes I take full responsibility for... and I apologize for nothing... I was hired to teach the boys the game of basketball and have done that to the best of my ability. You may not be pleased with the results... but I am... I am very proud of my players... and...

Ollie, in the window, gulps. The crowd is quiet. Norm doesn't go on. He looks directly at Myra.

NORM
(continuing)
Isn't it your turn now?

Their looks hold. Norm then walks back down the aisle to his seat. Myra is frozen in her seat looking indecisive.

(CONTINUED)

76 CONTINUED: (2)

ROOSTER
Say what ya gotta say and let's get on with it.

Myra hesitantly rises and slowly makes her way to the lectern. Looking down the whole time she takes her folded paper and flattens it.

MYRA
(looking up, her voice unsteady)
I think in order to be fair...
(she stops and starts reading)
... From the Buffalo Courier dated March 19, 1935. Norman Dale, Coach of the National Champions, Ithaca Warriors, was given...

Myra stops, unable to go on. She looks up again. Finally...

MYRA
(continuing)
I think it would be a big mistake if we let Coach Dale go.

Norm's face registers the shock. The crowd starts hollering her down. "What's going on," "Let's vote," "No more talk." George takes over the lectern.

77 EXT. CHURCH

OLLIE
They're passin' out slips 'a paper.

LOETTA
Can't believe we've been cheerin' our hearts out for a bunch of gutless yellow-bellied wind suckers.

MERLE
I tried, Loetta.

LOETTA
It's so close... if ya just let 'em know how ya feel.

(CONTINUED)

77 CONTINUED:

MERLE
(standing)
Okay. I'm going if no one else will.

BUDDY
(standing)
Wait a second.

OLLIE
(jumping down from the ladder)
Yeah, let's give those hornswogglers some what for.

RADE
Aw to hell with you guys.

Roger stands and joins them, followed quickly by Whit. Everett silently lumbers over. The boys all look to the one missing member. Strap snaps out of it and smiling broadly, joins the group. The team, intact, walk to the door together and knock. Roy opens it.

MERLE
We'd all like to put our two bits in.

ROY
Can't come in, boys. 'Sides, it's too late.

Merle tries to step in the front door.

MERLE
Don't we count for somethin'?

ROY
(pushing him back)
Go home, boys, he's through.

Roy slams the door shut.

78 INT. CHURCH

Counting the ballots are George and Reverend Doty. Rollin is standing behind them carefully watching. George marks the last ballot, sets it aside and smiles broadly. Rollin looks away. Myra's face falls.

79 EXT. CHURCH

Ollie on the ladder.

79 CONTINUED:

OLLIE
Looks bad for Coach.

The group, some with their heads down, stand quietly around the ladder. Suddenly, in the distance a SOUND, vague at first, starts to grow. SLAP... SLAP... SLAP... SLAP... SLAP... SLAP... SLAP. They all peer into the dark shadows. Emerging from the dim light dribbling his ubiquitous basketball is Jimmy. Without looking at the small crowd outside the church, he walks directly to the front door and pushes it open.

ROY
Jimmy! Whatta you doin' here?

Jimmy is staring toward the front of the church.

ROY
(continuing; excited)
Hey... looks like we gonna get us a new coach.

Jimmy paying no attention to Roy, walks past him down the center aisle. The decibel level drops. Roy slowly approaches the lectern with a slip of paper, sees Jimmy and stops. There is quiet. Norm leans forward, not getting it.

JIMMY
(quietly to Roy)
Got somethin' to say.

Roy is speechless. Rollin steps down and turns Jimmy toward the crowd.

ROLLIN
Son, say what you gotta say.

JIMMY
(hesitantly)
Don't know if it'll make any change but I figure it's time for me to play ball.

It takes awhile for this to set in but once it does people start clapping, yelling "I told you once we got rid of him."

JIMMY
(continuing; holds up his head)
One thing. I play, Coach stays... He goes, I go.

This brings an eruption of sound.

79 CONTINUED: (2)

Norm looks as if he is not believing what he is hearing. George rushes to the lectern and takes the slip of paper from Roy.

GEORGE
Motion passes 59 to 51.

Roy grabs the paper back and a quick meeting is convened by the principals. After a few brief but intense exchanges, Roy hands the paper to Rollin who walks to the lectern and tears the paper in half.

ROLLIN
Recount shows the resolution failing.

Jimmy is on his way down the aisle while most of the crowd cheers. Even Myra can't conceal her pleasure. Millie hugs Norm. Opal rushes back to congratulate him. Norm doesn't see any of them as he stares after Jimmy walking out the front door.

80 EXT. CHURCH

A number of the students waiting are jumping up and down. As Jimmy walks by, Loetta runs up and kisses him. Embarrassed, he keeps walking.

OLLIE
(excited)
Practice tomorrow at three.

MERLE
Jimmy... Are we gonna do it?

Jimmy stops, turns around.

JIMMY
We are.

81 INT. HICKORY GYM - HICKORY VS. AURORA

And they do.

P.A.
Starting at guard, Jimmy Chitwood.

The fans go nuts. We'll see why. In the huddle on the sideline, Norm and Jimmy's eyes connect. Jimmy holds four fingers to Norm. Norm nods, giving the sign back to Jimmy. A long beat. Jimmy runs onto the court.

Jimmy stealing the ball and driving for a layup.

(CONTINUED)

81 CONTINUED:

Jimmy shooting a long range jump shot.

Jimmy dribbling toward the basket and passing off to Merle for an easy score.

Jimmy dominating the game setting the tempo. The missing ingredient. The "machine" is now running efficiently.

Opal seeing the magic.

And the team suddenly looks like they have been playing together for years, which, in fact, they have.

Hickory 62 - Aurora 54.

82 INT. MYRA'S CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

The last of the students file out as Norm waits outside. He enters and stands near the door. Myra remains at her desk. Norm stares at her.

MYRA
Yes?

NORM
Why the endorsement? I thought...

MYRA
I'm not sure.

NORM
Whatever the reason...

MYRA
Probably best for the boys.

NORM
And you?

Myra stands and clears some items off her desk.

NORM
(continuing)
I had nothing to do with Jimmy...

MYRA
I know. You must be thrilled. Winning...

NORM
He was what we needed for it all to come together.
(MORE)

82 CONTINUED:

NORM (CONT'D)
But we were getting to be a real fine team without him.

MYRA
Coach's price.

Silence. Myra puts on her coat and walks toward the door where Norm is standing.

MYRA
(continuing)
You hit a player.

NORM
I did.

MYRA
Why?

Norm won't give it to her.

MYRA
(continuing)
He wasn't following orders and provoked you...

NORM
That's only a small part of it... It's not simple... I guess my need to win and win my way were the only two things that mattered in my life then. It happened in a flash... but after all this time, I still see it so clear... slowed down... like I could stop my fist from hitting his jaw... one second... and everything I worked for was finished... Funny thing... He was the best kid who ever played for me -- tough, stubborn, willful...

MYRA
(smiling)
Sounds like someone I know.

NORM
Maybe.

MYRA
And Jimmy?

NORM
He's in good hands.

82 CONTINUED: (2)

MYRA
(pausing)
I know.

And she exits.

83 INT. NORMAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Norman is shoving Shooter's head into a sink full of water. Shooter whips his head back and stumbles toward a chair spraying water everywhere.

NORM
Look, if you want to have anything to do with me or the team I'm giving you two choices. Go to a hospital and dry out or come back and help us.

SHOOTER
Don't know if I can cut it.

NORM
I was thinking the same thing a couple of nights ago... After what Jimmy did, it would have taken the Indiana National Guard to get me to leave.

SHOOTER
The ol' nerves are shot.

NORM
You know, we were just starting to come around as a team. Now, with Jimmy... all pistons are firing. These last ten games, we're going to be tough to beat. Why don't you come along for the ride?

SHOOTER
I want your word you won't get kicked out of no games.

Norm nods.

SHOOTER
(continuing; rubbing his hands)
Jimmy's back. It's catfish fryin' time.

And the fish fry.

84 SERIES OF SHOTS

Jimmy shooting and hitting a jump shot.

Norm, Shooter and Rollin on the bench exhorting their charges on.

Hickory 82 - Stinesville 52. (Each scoreboard different.)

Preacher Purl driving the team bus.

Loetta doing cartwheels.

Hickory 61 - Decatur 43.

Norm protesting a call, being restrained by Rollin and more desperately by Shooter.

Buddy stealing the ball and scoring.

VARIOUS SHOTS of team bus, different weather.

Hickory 52 - Columbus 49.

Ollie shaking his head, then reluctantly entering the game.

Hickory 58 - Rising Sun 30.

85 INT. HICKORY GYM - HICKORY VS. DUGGER

Hickory is ahead 58-54 with three minutes to go in the game. There is a collision on the floor. A foul is called on Everett. Norm stands and starts to walk toward the REFEREE. Rollin stops him.

ROLLIN
Last game of the year. No need to blow over now.

NORM
No problem, Rollin. Just want to ask him a question.

He pats Rollin on the shoulder and walks to the Referee.

NORM
(continuing)
You got pigeon shit in your eyes?

The Referee is in a rather benign mood.

(CONTINUED)

85 CONTINUED:

REFEREE
You could be right, my angle wasn't too good on that one.

Norm is thrown off a bit, recovers, and launches another shot.

NORM
You're pathetic. A disgrace to your profession.

The Referee almost starts laughing.

REFEREE
What are you gettin' so lathered up for?

Norm, exasperated, leans over and whispers harshly.

NORM
Will you please kick me out of the game?

REFEREE
You're puttin' me on. Some kind of joke, huh?

NORM
I'll keep screaming like a mad fool until you do.

REFEREE
(shrugs)
Suppose you got your reasons.

And, with a dramatic gesture, he motions Norm out of the game. The fans go wild. Norm, looking innocent, walks by the bench as Rollin glares at him suspiciously. Shooter is frozen in place.

NORM
(innocently)
Sorry. Got carried away again. Shooter...

Norm shakes Shooter's arm forcefully, trying to bring him out of shock.

NORM
(continuing)
The last minute is yours... Just let the boys play.

Norm leaves. Shooter, on the bench, shakes and sweats as he watches the last minute wind down.

85 CONTINUED: (2)

Dugger ties the game, and with thirty seconds remaining, regains control of the ball. Jimmy calls time out.

86 ANGLE - SIDELINE

The boys gather around Shooter, who, paralyzed, still hasn't moved from the bench. There is a long silence as they wait for him to say something. Finally...

EVERETT
(quietly)
Ya reckon thirty-four will put up their last shot?

SHOOTER
(to Everett)
Yeah...
(and with a thin voice)
They'll probably pick low like they been doin' all night. Rade, let yourself get taken out. Buddy, drop down in his place and close the lane.

The boys put their hands together. They look at Shooter who slowly puts his in.

ALTOGETHER
Machine.

87 ANGLE - FLOOR

They break. The play works out exactly as Shooter planned with Jimmy intercepting the pass. Shooter stands and calls time out.

88 ANGLE - SIDELINE

With more assurance, he kneels down in the center of the huddle.

SHOOTER
Run the picket fence. Merle, you're the swing man. Jimmy, you're solo left. Merle should be open swinging' around the fence. Let's do it, boys.

89 ANGLE - FLOOR

All the players line up to one side as Jimmy dribbles down the other. Merle cuts around the stationary players and is fired a perfect pass from Jimmy. He shoots and scores. Hickory wins 64-62. Players hug each other celebrating. Shooter joins them on the floor. Everett walks up to him.

EVERETT
You done good, Pop.

Shooter starts to reply but can't.

90 STATE TOURNEY TIME

SHOTS	NARRATION OVER RADIO
The town and the school transforming.	Here we are again.
Signs going up in storefront windows.	It's tourney time in Indiana. A yearly celebration of state pride.
Blue and gold ribbons, sheet bunting, draping from every conceivable object.	Like round-up time in Texas, maple sugar time in Vermont. Derby time in Kentucky.
In the school hallways the boys are patted on the back, encouraged.	A time when basketball is King, when normally dignified citizens lose their sense of balance.
Classroom is completely enshrouded in blue and gold. The class looks out of control. Marv holds up a book and points. Roger holds up a basketball and points.	It all comes down to show and tell. What they've all been working on for the past year. Shooting endless jump shots, driving endless miles from one gym to another, endless practices, endless injuries, wins, losses, overtimes, cheers, jeers, and tears.
Pep Rally. This time jammed to capacity. Standing ovations as the players are introduced.	
Roy's car, SIREN SCREAMING, leads a blue and gold caravan down a country road.	

91 SHOTS

SHOTS	NARRATION OVER RADIO
An usher waves two men with ice blocks past the gate. Once inside they dump the ice shaking hands.	785 high school teams all in one single elimination playoff.

(CONTINUED)

91 CONTINUED:

The boys, all business, enter the dressing room from outside the gym.

The gym packed to the rafters, alive with sixteen different cheering sections, sixteen different sets of colors.

NARRATION (CONT'D)
When it all starts out, everybody's got a chance. 55 sectional championships each one with 16 schools vying to represent their district in the regionals. One loss and you're part history. Goodbye, this season. Hello, next.

92 INT. LOCKER ROOM - DEER LICK - NIGHT

M.O.S. Norm is at a bulletin board. Each boy writes a different word in chalk. Concentration, application, inspiration, dedication, execution. White writes "hustle." The word is crossed out by Rade and replaced by "perspiration." Norm writes = . Jimmy scratches out in bold letters S U C C E S S. Buddy writes another equals sign and the word VICTORY.

93 INT. DEE LICK GYM (MARCH 1, 1952)

SERIES OF SHOTS showing Hickory doing just that. The boys are taking it to them.

Hickory 83	Cross Plains	66
Hickory 44	Osgood	32
Hickory 57	Deer Lick	53

94 INT. LOCKER ROOM - DEER LICK - NIGHT

The boys in their warm-ups. Norm, looking tense, wiping his brow.

NORM
It's been a while since Hickory's played for the sectional finals. Ten years to be exact. Now, the only way to get over nerves is to play through them.

MERLE
Who's nervous?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

94 CONTINUED:

MERLE (CONT'D)
We played these coon hounds 'fore Jimmy and did pretty good. We'll feed 'em to the lizards now.

NORM
Let's not get...

Reverend Doty enters suddenly.

REVEREND
You ready for me?

NORM
With all due respect, we're going to stick with the person who has stuck with us. Rollin, get Purl.

Rollin disappears. The Reverend looks at Norm for a moment.

REVEREND
You're in the right.
(to the boys)
May God be with you.

Purl passes the Reverend on his way out.

REVEREND
(continuing)
Make it a good one, Purl.

PURL
Only got one kind, Vernon.

95 INT. DEER LICK HIGH SCHOOL GYM - SECTIONAL FINALS - HICKORY VS. SUNVILLE

The crowd is pumped high as the boys go through their warm-ups. Each finalist has picked up the support of different losing schools. Norm motions Everett over.

NORM
Where is your father?

EVERETT
Said he wanted to be alone. Too much pressure.

They look at each other.

NORM
(points to his head)
Stay in the game.

(CONTINUED)

95 CONTINUED:

Everett nods.

And the game is on. Sunville jumps out into an early lead. J. June is scoring every time he gets his hands on the ball. Hickory fights back to a slight advantage on the strength of Merle's inside play.

Halftime Hickory 38-35.

In the second half, J. June works Jimmy over to some extent neutralizing him. Huddle before the fourth quarter.

Sunville 52-49.

NORM
Everett, when you screen on J. June give him some of the business he's been giving Jimmy.

Play resumes.

Suddenly from under one of the goals Shooter staggers onto the court. Play stops. Rollin and Norm are at his side first, immediately before Everett gets there.

NORM
(continuing; pushing Everett away)
We'll handle this. Rollin, get him out of here.

SHOOTER
(slurring loudly; to Ref)
Throw that bum in the hootch...

Rollin wraps his arm around Shooter's chest and drags him off the court. He continues yelling.

The game resumes. Everett begins to play like a man possessed -- too possessed. When J. June shoves Jimmy after a layup, Everett runs right at J. June, knocks him flat and crashes into the gym door, shattering the window. J. June, lying on his back, is attended to by a doctor. Everett, his shoulder bleeding profusely, is kicked out of the game. Junior is screaming at the referee.

JUNIOR
Forfeit that team. My boy can't play.

Norm runs up.

(CONTINUED)

95 CONTINUED: (2)

REF
If he's not fit enough to come back in the game, we'll file a protest if you'uns lose.

NORM
That's a gutless way to win.

JUNIOR
Get out of my face.

The Ref stands between them. J. June, his nose bandaged and one of his eyes almost swollen shut, stands up.

J. JUNE
Let's play ball.

JUNIOR
(turning, whispering)
You ain't going out there.

J. JUNE
(pushing him aside)
We win... we'll win on the floor.

The game resumes and becomes a shooting duel between J. June and Jimmy. With fifteen seconds to go, Jimmy hits a shot putting Hickory ahead by two points, 64-62. As J. June takes the ball from out of bounds, Buddy steals it from him, runs back up the court and throws the ball high in the air as the GUN SOUNDS.

All hell breaks loose as the crowd floods onto the floor.

Rade takes the championship trophy and runs around the gym holding it aloft.

Buddy runs over with a ball and hands it to Norm.

BUDDY
Game ball's yours.

Norm nods as Buddy runs off.

J. June appears and shakes Norm's hand.

J. JUNE
No hard feelin's.... all in the game... We'll be with you all next week.

(CONTINUED)

95 CONTINUED: (3)

Norm looks up at the basket 20 feet away, back down at the ball in his hands, and over to J. June. Perhaps remembering his first day at the gas station, he finally smiles and launches a shot.

Swish.

96 EXT. FOREST

Norm and Everett are trampling over snow-covered brush on the now familiar route to Shooter's cave. As they reach the cave opening they spot his prostrate figure covered with a layer of snow.

97 INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR

A Doctor walks Norm down a long corridor and motions him into a room. Shooter is in bed staring at the ceiling.

NORM
We're keeping you here a couple of months. You'll be dry as the Sahara when you get out.

SHOOTER
Goblin-visitin' time.

NORM
There'll be others of us.

Silence.

SHOOTER
(with difficulty)
You took a chance on an ole shiftless drunk... Didn't pay off.

NORM
You couldn't be more wrong.

98 INT. FLEENER HOUSE - DAY

Opal is giving Norm a haircut.

NORM
We're still in the tournament and people act like the season's over.

(CONTINUED)

98 CONTINUED:

OPAL
Winnin' sectionals is like takin' grand prize 'round these parts. Most little farm schools can't match up to those big city schools in regionals. First school we play has more 'n 1500 kids.

NORM
They can only put five of them on the floor at the same time.

OPAL
Nobody's prayin' harder for the boys than me but, fact is, no one from this section ever reached a regional final...

She takes a towel off his neck. Norm gets up, puts on his coat and walks to the door.

NORM
Where's Myra?

OPAL
Avoidin' you...

NORM
Nothing's changed.

OPAL
Believe you're wrong there.

Norm heads out the door.

OPAL
(continuing)
Make us proud tomorrow.

99 EXT. FLEENER HOUSE - DAY

Norm waves back out at Opal and starts toward his car. He veers toward the mill house when he sees Myra kneeling, working in the garden.

NORM
Do you usually garden in the snow?

MYRA
Yesterday's was last of the year.

NORM
How do you know?

(CONTINUED)

99 CONTINUED:

MYRA
The Almanac. Says it's near time to start planting.

NORM
I'm sure the planting can wait. Come on, let's take a walk.

Before she can protest, Norm grabs her elbow and pulls her up.

100 EXT. RIDGE - AFTERNOON

Norm and Myra reach the crest of a tree-lined ridge overlooking a green, brown and white patchwork quilt valley. A fine, misting snow is falling. Norm holds his hand out to check it.

NORM
The Almanac?

MYRA
... is never wrong. This is what we call a spring drizzle.

NORM
(shakes his head)
Farmer's daughter.

MYRA
Miller's.

They reach the ridge's edge.

MYRA
(continuing)
In late spring those fields turn an unreal green, like in those postcards you buy on vacation. And in the summer it turns...

NORM
You feel like driving to Deer Lick and seeing a movie?

MYRA
Don't we both have early days tomorrow?

Norm walks around to face her directly. She looks down.

(CONTINUED)

100 CONTINUED:

NORM
First time I saw you, unfriendly as could be, there in the school hallway, all I thought about later was kissing you... And after that no matter how difficult you were I still kept imagining kissing you, holding you... And now... I'm tired of imagining.

Myra looks up hesitantly, her eyes wet.

MYRA
(quietly)
It's been a long time.

NORM
For me, too.

Norm uncrosses her arms and they kiss; tentatively at first, then with more passion. They finally break, holding each other like they'll never let go.

101 INT. CLETUS' ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Cletus is sitting up in his bed, one leg still in a cast, listening to the RADIO. Norm walks in and sits down.

NORM
If winning a sectional will get you sitting up, winning the regional should get you out of bed.

CLETUS
Don't set your sights on it.

NORM
I am.

LOETTA (O.S.)
(screaming from downstairs)
Come on, Norm. We gotta drive sixty miles.

CLETUS
No back slidin' in Jasper.

NORM
You're safe there.

(CONTINUED)

101 CONTINUED:

CLETUS
For an old-timer you've done some serious growin' up.

NORM
I've been lucky.

CLETUS
And good... I'll be there with you tonight... in here.

Points to his chest.

102 INT. LOCKER ROOM - JASPER GYMNASIUM

Tense silence. Whispering. Deep breathing.

This locker room is more elaborate than any we've seen before. The boys are quietly dressing in front of their lockers.

NORM
I wish we knew more about this team.

ROLLIN
Don't matter much.

NORM
You're not another "we're out of our league" type.

ROLLIN
I'm a practical sort.

Ollie crosses to Norm.

OLLIE
Never seen that many people in one place in my life.

NORM
No need to be nervous. There are only eight times as many people out there as in the whole town of Hickory.

OLLIE
Thanks, Coach. I'm feelin' better.

Norm crosses to Everett. His shoulder is still heavily bandaged.

102 CONTINUED:

NORM
Doc says it starts bleeding and you're out.

EVERETT
(shaking his head)
Could be last ball game I ever play if'n we lose. Got a long spell for healin' -- rest of my days.

103 INT. JASPER GYMNASIUM (MARCH 12, 1954)

Hickory vs. North Vernon.

More than 4000 fans are exhorting their teams on sophisticated banners and card sections are part of a new look. This is more big-time and official than anything we've seen before. Lots of men with suits. A large radio broadcasting section. The Hickory contingent is by contrast more ragtag rural than the others.

104 SHOTS

Hickory players shaking hands with taller, more well-turned out opponents.

North Vernon using their height for easy layups.

Jimmy calling for the ball, shooting, scoring.

Norm yelling at his players.

A North Vernon player, flustered, loses the ball out of bounds.

Everett viciously pulling down a rebound.

Hickory players celebrating.

Hickory 58, North Vernon 50.

More shots, another win. The machine at work.

Hickory 65, New Albany 48.

105 EXT. JASPER GYM - NIGHT

The boys, grim-faced and determined, are getting off the bus carrying their duffel-sacks.

(CONTINUED)

105 CONTINUED:

Awaiting and standing between them and the locker room door are a mob of fans, some, but not all, from Hickory. They converge on the players slapping them on the back, yelling and screaming.

ROLLIN
They ain't never seen nothin' like it.

NORM
I wish they'd save it till after the game.

The crowd starts chanting "State Finals, State Finals." A REPORTER comes up to Norm.

REPORTER
Does the team believe it can make it to the Championship Final?

Sheriff Roy grabs the Reporter and pushes him aside.

NORM
(to Roy)
Now you're protecting me.

ROY
There ain't enough apologizin' for the bunch of us.

NORM
I don't want apologies. Just get my boys inside the gym.

Roy pulls his night stick out and begins blowing his whistle.

106 INT. LOCKER ROOM

The boys are dressed and ready. Norm is at the blackboard.

NORM
Buddy, this boy Billy scores half their points. Think of him as chewing gum. By the end of the game, I want you to tell me what flavor he is.

Norm pushes the blackboard aside.

(CONTINUED)

106 CONTINUED:

NORM
(continuing)
There is a tradition in tournament play to not talk about the next step until you've climbed the one in front of you. I'm sure going to the State Finals has been beyond your wildest dreams. For the next 36 minutes, let's keep it there. Forget about the crowd, the size of the other school, how fancy their uniforms are, in fact... forget about winning and losing, just...

BUDDY
(standing)
Coach... We're gonna forget about losin' but we ain't forgettin' about winnin'... You always talkin' about playin' to potential... That don't matter now. We ain't got this far to go out and lose.

Norm and the boys stare silently at Buddy until Merle starts clapping rhythmically. The others join in until the applause blends into:

107 INT. JASPER GYM (MARCH 13, 1952)

Hickory vs. Jasper -- Regional Championships.

The crowd, with the exception of the hometown fans, is mostly with the underdog. From the beginning, we see this is an extremely rough game. Jasper, a physically more dominant team, is trying to intimidate Hickory -- and succeeding.

First half score -- Jasper 34, Hickory 18.

In the second half the Hickory machine starts to go to work. Jimmy starts connecting. Hickory shuts down their star guard, Billy Rayl. With six minutes remaining, Rade fouls out of the game.

Tie score 45-45.

NORM
Whit, go in for your brother.

(CONTINUED)

107 CONTINUED:

RADE
They're beatin' on us out there, Coach. We're foulin' to stay alive.

The score goes back and forth as the intensity level of the crowd increases.

Suddenly, Jasper's center pulls down a rebound, swings his elbow viciously into Everett's bandaged shoulder. Blood immediately starts pouring down his arm. Norm and Doc Buggins runs over to him.

NORM
A quick patch job ought to do it.

DOC
(examining the wound)
Your stitches have ripped out. You're finished.

NORM
(to Doc)
You don't know what you're talking about.

Norm calls time out and walks Everett over to the bench. He takes out a medical kit and urgently tapes Everett's shoulder. The WHISTLE BLOWS to resume play. Norm shoves Everett onto the court.

NORM
(continuing; intense)
Keep boxing out. Dammit. We're going to win this game.

Norm sits down and takes a deep breath. We HOLD on Norm as his expression changes. He puts his head in his hands, stands and calls time out. Huddle.

NORM
(continuing; quietly at first)
Everett, you're through.

EVERETT
Coach, it'll be...

NORM
Strap, you've got Everett's spot. Don't shoot unless you're all alone underneath the basket.

Strap bows his head and goes down on one knee.

(CONTINUED)

107 CONTINUED: (2)

NORM
(continuing)
Not now, Strap.

Strap's eyes are closed, his mouth is moving soundlessly.

NORM
(continuing)
Strap, God is calling for you on the court.

Suddenly, as if possessed, Strap leaps up. The first time he touches the ball, even though heavily guarded, he shoots. The ball somehow, "miraculously," goes in. After they get the ball back, Strap, again, shoots and scores. Norm calls time-out.

Hickory 54-50. Time remaining 1:30.

NORM
What's gotten into you?

STRAP
The Lord. I feel His strength.

NORM
From now on, keep the strength in your dribble. We're putting it into the deep freeze. No shots. Let them foul us to get the ball. And Buddy.... you got four fouls on you. Hands off. We need you in there.

Hickory stalls for 35 seconds until Buddy, dribbling underneath the basket to avoid a trap, collides with a Jasper player. While everyone holds their breath, the Referee points to Buddy. Charging. His fifth and final foul. Norm turns slowly to his bench and stares at Ollie who has very suddenly gone into shock.

NORM
(continuing)
Ollie.

No response. Norm kneels down in front of him.

NORM
(continuing; quiet but firm)
Ollie, we need you.

OLLIE
But...

(CONTINUED)

107 CONTINUED: (3)

NORM
Now.

Ollie reluctantly gets up. As he moves out on the court he looks like someone who has just discovered himself without clothes. The boys encourage him.

BUDDY
(sitting down)
It was Dentyne.

Norm nods.

An immediate Jasper score.

Jasper 54-52. Time left 50 seconds.

Jimmy stalling the ball in the backcourt sees Ollie, looking like a midget among giants, open underneath the basket. He passes it to him. Ollie dribbles the ball off his foot and out of bounds. Jasper scores again.

Tie score 54-54. Time left 30 seconds.

The Jasper players point toward Ollie, back away, leaving him wide open. Everett, trapped in a corner, throws it to Ollie.

JASPER COACH
(yelling to his players)
Foul the runt.

Ollie is intentionally fouled.

As he goes to the free throw line the NOISE level INCREASES. On his first attempt the ball falls five feet short. His second is little better. Jasper takes the ball up the court with twenty seconds to go. Jimmy attempts a steal and fouls his man. Jasper makes one of two shots.

Jasper 55-54. Time left: 10 seconds.

Jimmy quickly pushes the ball into the forecourt, looking for a last shot. Coming from behind, a Jasper player punches the ball loose. It goes right to Ollie, who with four seconds to go, launches a ten foot shot. The ball goes up and over the backboard. A Jasper player attempting to block the shot comes down on top of Ollie. Foul. Rushville calls time out. The boys gather around Norm as the crowd chants Ollie's name.

(CONTINUED)

107 CONTINUED: (4)

CROWD
Ollie, Ollie, oh by gosh, oh by golly, he's a Hickory Husker.

Ollie's head is down. Norm reaches over and lifts his chin up.

NORM
As soon as Ollie makes his second shot get back on defense. They might have time for a desperation throw.

They put their hands together and break. Strap stays down on one knee clutching Ollie's hand tightly.

Norm breaks the grip. Ollie slowly, almost shyly, walks to the free throw line. A Jasper player walks up to him and whispers in his ear.

PLAYER
Didn't know they grew 'em so small down on the farm.

The referee hands Ollie the ball. He takes a deep breath and lets it go. Bouncing on the front and then the back rim the ball finally drops through.

Tie score 55-55.

The inside of the gym is vibrating. Jasper fans are doing everything to disrupt Ollie. He takes the ball again and almost unconsciously shoots it. Swish. Jasper tries a half-court shot which falls far short.

Fans and players engulf Ollie lifting him to their shoulders.

Hickory is going to the state championships.

108 INT. HOSPITAL

Shooter, sitting over the side of the bed, is talking excitedly to a nurse.

SHOOTER
No school that small ever got to the finals. I was coach for a spell. Won a big game. My boy is...

Suddenly Shooter's attention is diverted to the doorway where Everett is standing.

(CONTINUED)

108 CONTINUED:

EVERETT
How ya doin'?

Everett walks over. Shooter grabs his hand.

SHOOTER
The conquerin' hero. Was listenin' to that big ole Philco over there and when Ollie hit that last charity toss I started bellowin' like a fool. The white coats came with the jacket but was feelin' so good I didn't much mind.

EVERETT
(slowing him down)
Yer doin' good?

SHOOTER
(more serious)
Insides still heavy. Gettin' some real bad visions... son... the other night.

EVERETT
Don't matter.

Shooter lays back in his bed.

EVERETT
(continuing)
You're gonna get well. In a couple of months when you're outta here we're gonna get a house... the both of us.

Shooter nods, his eyes moist.

EVERETT
(continuing)
Gotta get back.

SHOOTER
(whispering)
Wish I could be there.

EVERETT
I'll be thinkin' of ya.

Shooter reaches out. They embrace.

109 INT. HICKORY GYM

The boys are going through the paces as a large audience looks on. Photographers are snapping pictures and REPORTERS are cornering anyone who will talk.

OLLIE
(to a reporter)
I knew I had it all the way...

Ollie catches Norm's look.

OLLIE
(continuing)
Tell you about it later.

110 INT. CLASSROOM - DUSK

Norm is fielding questions from reporters.

REPORTER ONE
How did you do it?

NORM
I didn't. The boys did.

REPORTER TWO
The team you're matched against in the final, Roosevelt, is one of the power teams in the state. Their front line is 6'4", 6'5", and 6'5". How can your little guys compete?

NORM
I don't know.

REPORTER THREE
Do you have scouting reports on them?

NORM
No, I'll tell you something more important to me than scouting reports. My boys only know basketball, farming, and school, probably in that order. Most of them haven't seen a building taller than two stories except in a picture. Taking them to Indianapolis to play before 18,000 people is like you and me going to the moon. No, what kind of team we play is the least of my concerns.

(CONTINUED)

110 CONTINUED:

MYRA
(we see her for the first time)
Will you be back to coach next season?

Norm just smiles.

111 EXT. HICKORY MAIN STREET

The sun's first pink streaks make glints off the line of cars reaching back as far as the eye can see. A steaming early spring mist burns off revealing a town festooned with blue and gold signs, flags and assorted regalia. Parked at the head of the line is Sheriff Roy's car followed by the gaudily decorated Hickory fire engine. Behind that are the team bus, suitably decked out, and a Sunville and a Cross Plains bus. The area around the team bus is jammed with well wishers as the players prepare to board. The mood is eerily serene.

In the distance we pick up a group coming toward the bus. Norm pushing Cletus in an extended wheelchair, Millie and Loetta walk by the crowd lining the streets. Norm is patted on the back, encouraged. Junior intercepts Norm.

JUNIOR
Only six months back you was askin' directions how to get here. Shoulda pointed you the opposite way. But... we're all with you now. Kick their butts real good.

Junior extends his hand.

112 SHOTS

A six-foot girl picks up Ollie and kisses him.

J. June demonstrating a jump shot to Jimmy.

George shaking hands with Buddy.

Rooster, dressed in a fireman's uniform, is going from one player to the next pumping their arms so furiously his hat keeps falling off.

NORM
Where's your Apache costume?

(CONTINUED)

112 CONTINUED:

ROOSTER
My number came up dry 'n tickets is scarcer than hen's teeth. Wearin' this to git in the door.

NORM
Too bad. If we win tonight we've agreed to change our names to the Apaches.

Norm turns and walks off. Rooster starts jumping up and down.

Myra embraces Jimmy.

Everett stands awkwardly by himself nodding as well wishers pass him by.

Strap, Purl and Mom kneeling in a circle holding hands in prayer.

A police car and fire engine SIRENS SCREAMING, come roaring into town.

ROY
(to Norm)
Genoa's lookin' after the town... we're ready to go, coach.

The boys file on the bus. Norm spots Myra through the crowd. Their eyes hold a moment and they start walking toward each other. When they meet Norm walks her away from the crowd to Rooster's Barber Shop alcove.

MYRA
(turning to watch Jimmy get on the bus)
He's going to make it.

NORM
We all are.

MYRA
(pausing)
I never was too partial to Alan Ladd... but there's a Gary Cooper movie playing now in Deer Lick.

NORM
Well... I'm busy tonight but... after that... no plans.

MYRA
Good.

(CONTINUED)

112 CONTINUED: (2)

Norm leans over and kisses her. Hold until Opal taps Norm on the back.

OPAL
Let's go, kids. There's plenty a time for all of that later. We got a ball game to play.

A BUGLE CALL goes off and SIRENS start wailing.

Rollin reaches down, picks up Cletus in his wheelchair and starts to carry him on the bus. Suddenly, Cletus' face goes white, his jaw drops. The SIRENS STOP. Dead quiet. Rollin turns to see where Cletus is looking. His jaw goes slack too.

A tall, erect FIGURE with flowing white hair, his aged and angular clothes standing out at the pockets, strides forcefully down the center of the street.

ROLLIN
The General.

Ignoring the gaped mouth observers, he walks directly up to Cletus (still being held by Rollin).

GENERAL
Been waitin' all my days for a blessed by God miracle to happen and I'm not goin' to miss it... for nothin' or nobody.

The General turns and boards the bus.

And now the caravan is off.

113 EXT./INT. BUS RIDE

The five mile caravan snakes its way through the rolling countryside.

They see:

Passing through a small town, banners and signs hanging from store fronts or telephone poles, propped up on the court house lawn, or held by every different size, shape or aged person.

Signs line the roadside. Among them, Hickory All The Way, Shakamak's With The Huskers, Our David Beat Their Goliath, Farmer's Delight.

Bands play, fire engines shoot water in the air when the team bus goes by.

(CONTINUED)

113 CONTINUED:

Along an isolated road a farmer, his wife and boy stand by a mailbox with a make-shift cardboard sign -- We Love Hickory.

The landscape slowly starts to change as the bus enters the flatlands.

The country turns to city. Multi-laned roads, multi-pump gas stations, a few scattered television antennas, sprawling estate-like homes, factories, warehouses, downtown, 20, 30 story buildings.

Silence on the bus. Each boy's face is pressed against the window wide-eyed.

Finally turning into a vast parking lot the bus pulls in front of a mammoth structure. Butler Fieldhouse -- Home of the Indiana State Championship.

114 EXT./INT. FIELDHOUSE

Norm and the boys carrying their duffel sacks are met at the door by an OFFICIAL.

OFFICIAL
Hickory! You're the most exciting thing to ever happen to Indiana basketball. You got the floor from 10:00 to 12:00. Game starts at 7:00 We're all with you. Tear 'em up.

The boys enter and stop. 18,000 empty seats. The arena is being readied for the day's events. Huge flags being lowered into place. Television cameras being set up. Clear plexiglass backboards are being positioned. And seats -- endless seats. Norm and the boys stand in awe. An official motions them forward. Norm walks with them onto the floor to the base of one of the goals. Rollin hands Norm a retractable tape measure.

NORM
Pay attention.

Norm hooks one end on the rim of the basket and pulls the tape to the floor.

NORM
(continuing)
Rade, come here and tell me what this says.

(CONTINUED)

114 CONTINUED:

RADE
Ten feet.

Norm walks to Whit to the free throw line, gives him one end of the tape and walks back with the other to the end line.

NORM
Buddy, how far?

BUDDY
Fifteen feet.

Norm turns to the players and stares at them intently.

NORM
My guess is that those are the same measurements you'll find in our gym at Hickory.

115 INT. LOCKER ROOM

Spacious and well turned out.

The boys are dressed and pacing. Norm at the blackboard.

NORM
Their top gun is a player named Delmar Roberts. Averaging about 26 a game. Buddy, I don't want you to leave his side. Remember, no inside penetration. Cut off the passing lanes.

Norm's chalk breaks as he tries to diagram the defense.

OLLIE
Nervous, coach?

NORM
(too quickly)
No...

RADE
All of 'em are Negroes.

NORM
Yes. Roosevelt is an all Negro high school.

OLLIE
We ain't never played against no Negroes.

(CONTINUED)

115 CONTINUED:

MERLE
They play any different.

NORM
Yeah, they run faster, jump higher and shoot better.

MERLE
No!

NORM
Let's worry about us.

An OFFICIAL comes in.

OFFICIAL
Take the floor, Hickory.

A deadening silence. In the distance we hear the MUFFLED SOUNDS of the waiting arena.

NORM
We're way past big speech time... I just want to say... thank you... for making the last months the most... special in my life.

He sits down with the boys.

NORM
(continuing)
Would anybody like to say anything?

Silence.

MERLE
Let's win this one for all the little schools who never had a chance to get here.

EVERETT
... I want to win for my dad.

BUDDY
For coach... who got us here.

Norm, moved, gets up quickly, goes to the door and returns with Reverend Doty and Preacher Purl. They stand side by side.

(CONTINUED)

115 CONTINUED: (2)

PREACHER PURL
And David put his hand in the bag and took out a stone and slung it, and struck the Philistine on the head and he fell to the ground.

REVEREND DOTY
With God of heaven it is all one, to deliver with a great multitude or a small company. For the victory of battle standeth not in the multitude of host; but strength cometh from heaven.

Norm takes his place between the boys and sticks his hands out. The others join. There is a sudden POUNDING on the door.

Suddenly, barging his way in, white pajama legs sticking out from underneath baggy overalls, is Shooter.

Norm and the boys, still with their hands together look up. Norm motions Shooter over. Shooter moves between Norm and Everett and joins his hands to the circle. They look at each other for that eternal moment.

NORM
I love you guys.

116 INT. BUTLER FIELDHOUSE (MARCH 20, 1952)

Hickory vs. Gary Roosevelt -- State Championship Final.

Coming out the door boys burst into an EXPLOSION OF SOUND and light. Jimmy trips over a cable, recovers and leads the team toward the other end of the floor. He tries a layup putting the ball against the backboard so hard it bounces about fifteen feet away from the basket. The boys are dazed, stiff, moving awkwardly. Vibrating colors and WAVES OF SOUND engulf them. Large bulky television cameras loom on the side.

And the boys can't help being aware of another awesome sight. Some of Roosevelt's players are <u>dunking</u> the basketball.

The team huddles by itself at mid-court.

RADE
My God!

(CONTINUED)

116 CONTINUED:

MERLE
My heart's beatin' out of my chest.

RADE
My God!

MERLE
Do you see those guys?

RADE
My God!

Everett slaps Rade hard in the face.

RADE
(continuing; shaking his head)
Okay. Let's go.

RADIO ANNOUNCER
The most incredible and improbable confrontation in the illustrious history of the Indiana High School Tournament takes place in tonight's championship game when the pint sized, barely big enough for two syllables, Hickory Huskers with an enrollment of 64, take on defending state champions, the mighty Bearcats of Gary Roosevelt with an enrollment of 2800. They're already calling it the game of the century. News people from all over the Midwest are here to witness Hoosierland's version of the Cinderella story.

117 INT. BUTLER FIELDHOUSE

The STATE SONG is coming to a close as the players come to the sidelines.

SINGERS
From the fields there comes the breath of new mown hay, through the sycamores the candlelights are gleaming, on the banks of the Wabash far away.

(CONTINUED)

117 CONTINUED:

P.A.
Welcome to the Championship Game of the Indiana High School Basketball Tournament... Starting at forward from Hickory 5'10" Rade Butcher. From Roosevelt 6'4" Bill Bonham.

Each pair of players runs on the court, shake hands, and break to different sides. As the introductions are made we intersperse shots of our main characters, the fans inside, and the press, with...

118 EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

A large crowd gathered outside the fieldhouse in front of a large temporary loudspeaker.

119 EXT. INDIANA STREETS - BIG AND SMALL TOWNS - NIGHT

Empty.

P.A.
At center from Hickory 6'1" Merle Webb and from Roosevelt 6'7" Willie Henderson.

120 SHOTS

of people crowded around radios and box-like televisions.

P.A.
And at guard from Hickory 5'10" Jimmy Chitwood and from Roosevelt 6' even Alton Barnes.

Huddle. They wait for Norm to say something. Quiet. Finally Norm puts his hands out and is joined by the team.

ALTOGETHER
Machine.

As they break for the center court the fieldhouse erupts, people standing. Most of the 18,000 fans are behind Hickory.

Both teams shake hands.

(CONTINUED)

120 CONTINUED:

Roosevelt tips the ball to a player streaking toward the basket. He slams it home. More of the same follows.

Hickory in shock, seems lost. Norm calls a time out. Roosevelt 16-4.

MERLE
God they're good.

RADE
This is embarrassin'.

BUDDY
I can't stop that guy.

NORM
(challenging)
... Maybe everyone was right, we don't belong up here.

Silence.

MERLE
(raises hand)
Can I say something? I believe Jimmy can take that guy's guardin' him.

NORM
Jimmy?

Jimmy just nods. Just about every play is set up for him and he can't miss. The score gets closer. Roosevelt tries to force the middle and finds a closed door. Hickory's pressure defense causes Roosevelt to lose their poise and start pressing.

Everett rebounding, Merle driving, Rade defending, Buddy passing, Jimmy scoring.

The score goes back and forth. The boys are playing as well as they possibly can. Shooting only when open, passing and passing again, waiting for a crack in Roosevelt's seams. Roosevelt's success spins off their tall center who flashes over the free throw circle, receives the pass, turns and scores.

And with one minute to play Roosevelt is ahead 40-36.

Huddle.

NORM
We've got to risk it all.
(MORE)

120 CONTINUED: (2)

NORM (CONT'D)
Everybody go for the steal. Press them in the backcourt.

:45 -- a steal. :32 -- Jimmy scores. 40-38.

:28 -- a steal. :22 -- Jimmy scores. 40-40.

:18 -- a steal. Time out.

Norm stands away from the boys thinking. The crowd on their feet now, will not sit again this night.

NORM
(continuing; kneeling among the players)
Here's what we do. Jimmy, they're all going to be looking at you to shoot. You're going to be a decoy. Buddy, hold the ball until five seconds, fake the pass to Jimmy then hit Merle on the picket fence left. He should be open.

The boys are all looking down.

NORM
(continuing)
Well? What's wrong with you guys?

JIMMY
Don't worry, coach, I'll make it.

Norm stares at Jimmy, then at the players, their faces now looking up. A long moment. Norm looks at each boy, and finally to Jimmy. He nods.

121 ANGLE - FLOOR

The ball is passed into Jimmy. He stands at the half-court line, looking at the clock tick down. And with five seconds to go, dribbles it to the top of the free throw circle. The clock reads :03 when Jimmy releases the ball twenty feet away from the basket. As we follow the ball, it slows down, MOVING FRAME BY FRAME as it arcs.

Flash the faces, full of anticipation, of our characters, standing, clenching their hands together. Shooter, Opal, Myra, Cletus, Loetta, Millie, the General, Junior, J. June, Preacher Purl, mom, Reverend, Sheriff Roy, Rooster, George.

(CONTINUED)

121 CONTINUED:

And now, the boys: Ollie, Merle, Rade, Whit, Strap, Buddy, Everett, Jimmy.

And now, Norm -- waiting; waiting.

And suddenly now, it's quiet as the CAMERA MOVES through Hickory's lifeless, deserted streets, past the store fronts, the church and school, and finally...

Through the open doors of the empty, soundless gymnasium, across the floor toward a large framed team picture on the far wall. As we get closer, the team, in victorious celebration, comes suddenly INTO FOCUS. The legend at the bottom of the picture reads...

HICKORY HIGH SCHOOL -- STATE CHAMPIONS -- 1952

The coach, standing straight and proud, full of joy -- and the boys.

THE END